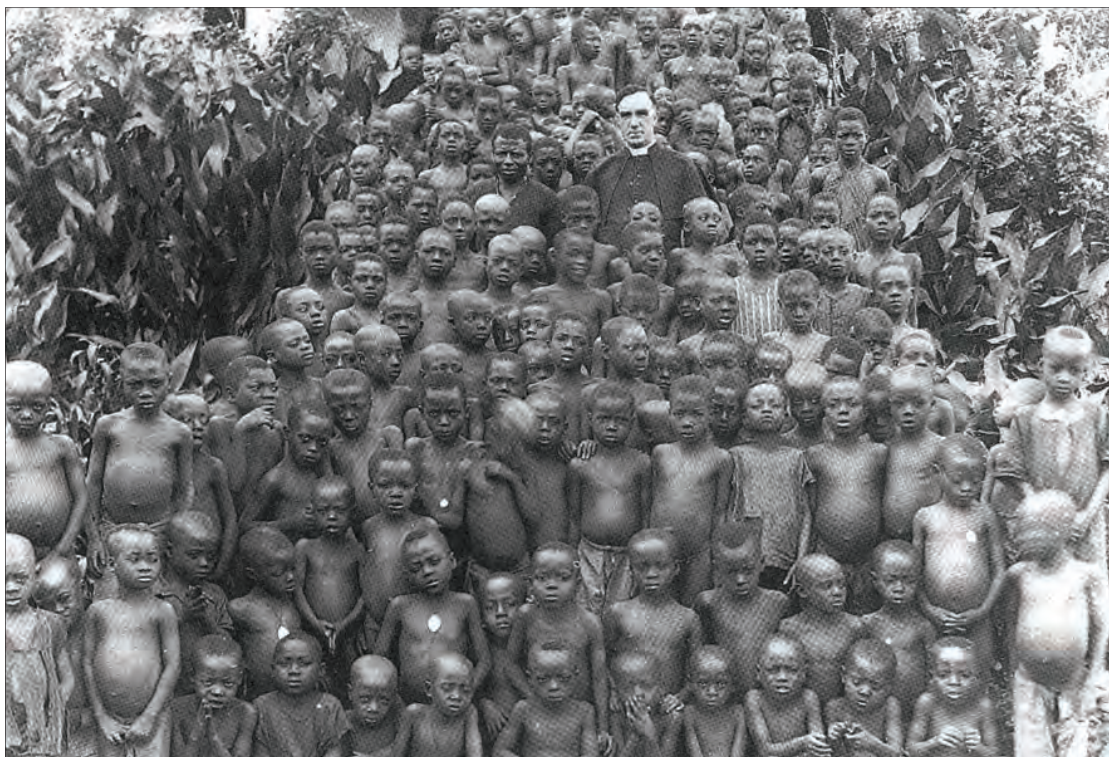


THE RESIDUE OF THE WESTERN MISSIONARY IN THE SOUTHERN CAMEROONS

*The Christian Village: A Sad Tale of
Strife and Dissension*



Peter Awoh

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Foreword

In 1916, following the defeat of the Germans, the Anglo-French ad hoc administration expelled the German Pallotine and Sacred Heart missionaries from Cameroon. The future and fate of the former German Pallotine and Sacred Heart missions became uncertain. During the period of uncertainty between their expulsion from Cameroon and their final repatriation to Germany, German missionaries expressed worries about the fate of their missions. Generally, the German missionaries had thought that the end of the first global conflict and signing of the peace agreements might lead to their return to their former stations in the colonies, but the peace arrangement in Versailles did not allow German nationals to resume their work in Cameroon. When it dawned on them that their return to their missions in Cameroon was out of the question, they explored other alternatives¹ The Versailles proclamation stated that German mission property should be taken over by trustees composed of persons holding the same faith as that of the owners of missions they were to take over. Proceeds from the sales of the German property in Cameroon formed the Liquidation Fund. The British government handed over these funds to the MILL HILL Missionaries when they took possession of the former German missions in Southern Cameroons.

When it became clear that German missionaries would not be permitted to enter into the territory, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fidei) moved swiftly to appoint Joseph Shanahan as Ecclesiastical Apostolic Administrator of Adamawa. Joseph Shanahan was Prefect Apostolic of Southern Nigeria and the attachment of the missions in the Cameroons only added a burden to this already beleaguered administrator. By attaching the missions of the Southern Cameroons to the

¹For example, in a letter from the British Vice Consul in Fernando Po to the British Resident Commissioner in Cameroon, the German Fathers expressed their wish that Belgian, Dutch and French Fathers of the same missionary order, who might be allowed to carry on the mission work in Bamenda, could be introduced to their work by the German Fathers who had been in charge of the missions before the war. Memorandum from the British Vice Consul, Fernando Po to the British Resident Commissioner Buea, September 19, 1919.

Prefecture Apostolic of Southern Cameroons, they were only mirroring and following the footsteps of colonial authorities. The British government administered Southern Cameroons as part of the Southern Province of Nigeria with headquarters in Enugu. For many years, the Church in Cameroon remained intimately linked to the eastern part of Nigeria in different ways. Rome erected Southern Cameroons as the Apostolic Prefecture in 1923, Apostolic Vicarate in 1939 and Diocese of Buea in 1950, under the Metropolitan See of Onitsha. The arrangement in which the former German missions in British Southern Cameroons² came under the auspices of the Prefect Apostolic of Southern Nigeria was to be short-lived because in the interim period between Shanahan's 1000 miles trek and the coming of the MILL HILL missionaries, Monsignor Plissonneau³ assumed his functions as the Prefect Apostolic of Adamawa. Njinikom and Shisong naturally came under the spheres of influence of the Prefect Apostolic of Adamawa. The priests in French Cameroon in parishes close to the British Cameroons extended their missions to include neighbouring missions in British Cameroon.

The years following the end of the First World War in Cameroon were turbulent, with conflict between the missions and traditional authorities. Trouble began with the return of former native German soldiers, who formed the nucleus of the first Christian communities. Colonial authorities at

² The Anglo-French accord to divide Cameroon was reached on March 4, 1916 and implemented on March 6, 1916. The general administration of the colony and protectorate of Nigeria and mandated territory of Cameroon was headed by the Governor General, who was resident in Lagos, the capital of the Federation. The Governor General was directly responsible to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London. Under the Governor General were two Lieutenant Governors at the head of the administration of the Southern and Northern groups of provinces. Under the Lieutenant Governor were senior Provincial Residents, each at the head of the provincial administration. British Southern Cameroons constituted the Cameroon province during the Mandate period. During the period of the Mandate, they were seven Residents in Cameroon. These were Major F.H. Ruxton (1921-25), E.J. Arnett (1925-28), H.G. Aveling (1928-29), E. J. Arnett (1929-32), Rutherford (1933-34), O.W. Firth (1935-38) and A.E.F. Murry (1939-42).

³Plissonneau had previously worked in Congo and was a member of the Sacred Heart Missionaries. He had been contacted by a Christian in Kumbo, Paul Tangwa and invited to come over to Kumbo.

first believed that the trouble was mainly because these Christian communities were void of any European clerical leadership. However, the coming of Monsignor Plissonneau did not bring the solution which colonial and traditional authorities had desperately hoped. Both the chiefs and colonial officers began gradually to modify their thoughts. The newly modified current of thought was a consequence of the events of the time. The idea was that peace would naturally return if missionaries of other nationalities like Monsignor Plissonneau were replaced with British missionaries. For this reason, the MILL HILL Missionaries were drafted into the territory to replace the French Sacred Heart Missionaries, especially in the Grass Fields where the troublesome spots of Njinikom and Kumbo were situated. Like their predecessors, their arrival did not bring the expected results. Their actions in many localities and especially in the Grass Fields, only added salt to injury. What the colonial authorities might or might not have foreseen and could not control, was that the ranks of the MILL HILL Missionaries, which had their origin in London, were swelled by candidates from a broad range of nationalities.

Esu, Shisong and Njinikom in the Bamenda Division in the 1920s and Baseng in Kumba Division in the 1930s and 1940s were hotspots of conflict between the Church and the traditional rulers and between the Church and colonial authorities, although almost every residue of the turbulent past seems to have been expunged today. These specific areas which had been arbitrarily selected and assigned, or in some cases accidentally became, the terrain on which the missionaries hoped to build ideal miniature Christian communities that would have a snowballing effect on the surrounding environment. In the immediate post war years, before the arrival of the MILL HILL Mission in the 1920s, these areas had become hotspots far beyond the control of colonial and traditional authorities. Christians, mainly ex-German soldiers, had established Christian communities against the wishes of both colonial and traditional authorities.

The German missionaries adopted the formal education as a medium through which they might gain a foothold in a locality. Traditional rulers generally welcomed the school project, oblivious to the danger that lay in its bosom. For them, it was a way to gain access to the wizardry of the Whiteman, to tap into the hidden treasures it might offer. For some reason, these school projects in the Grass Fields were located very close to the Fon's palace. Inserting a school in a locality was a novelty that generally caused no

disruption to the traditional life and raised no eyebrows from the custodians of the tribe, the chiefs. Surprisingly, as was the case in Nso, the traditional executive arm of the Fon took great pains to round up children to attend the schools. The missionaries reciprocated the goodwill of the chiefs, electing to depend on persuasion and avoid head-on confrontation. Before the outbreak of the First World War, confrontations were minimal or non-existent. According to the Divisional Officer of Bamenda Division "There was no major dispute between Christians and animists during the German period. But it was not until ex-German soldiers attempted to conduct a mission of their own that serious trouble began."⁴

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the missionaries left their respective missions. This sudden exit without prior proper preparation of a local leadership created a dangerous precedence. This leadership vacuum was quickly occupied by ill prepared, self-assuming indigenes. It was precisely during this period that the subtle animosity, which had been simmering, came into the open. Early converts, mainly schoolchildren, carried around them an air of superiority. They were the only ones in the locality who wore clothes and this closeness to the Whiteman and attachment to his ways naturally provoked some degree of jealousy. After the expulsion of the Whiteman, traditionalists forced many of these converts to relinquish the ways of the Whiteman and to return to the traditional way of life. With whatever cover and protection the Whiteman had provided gone, traditional rulers, who might have grudgingly allowed the Whiteman to turn the children away from the ways of their ancestors, lost no time in ordering a complete repudiation of his alien ways, including his religious ideas. In fact, it was not western merchandise that disenchanted the African traditional rulers most; rather, it was the western religious philosophy, which directly contradicted African religions and philosophy. The repulsive manner with which they reviled the religious ideas of the Whiteman had nothing in common with the manner in which they welcomed his gin and guns.

The persecution of the early converts took the form of scourging, imprisonment and ostracisation of those who had severed themselves from the roots and ways of their ancestors. Unknown to the traditional rulers, who were doing all that was humanly possible to obliterate even the smouldering

⁴ BNA-Sd 1921/1 Confidential Memorandum from the District Officer, Bamenda, to the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, January 20, 1920.

flame of Christianity, converts and non-converts who had been conscripted into the German army – were being “indoctrinated” and drilled in the guiding principles of Christianity. The soldiers who had been incarcerated at Fernando Po returned to their homeland no longer as German soldiers but as soldiers of the newfound religion of the Whiteman ready to face whatever resistance was in store for them. Their return generally aroused suspicion and fear in the minds and hearts of colonial and traditional authorities alike. Confidential colonial reports depicted these fears vividly. The soldiers-turned-Christians were armed with a very sinister weapon and the traditional rulers were to try in vain to convince them to abandon it and return to the ways of the tribe.

In the 1920s, the French Sacred Heart Fathers and, later, the MILL HILL missionaries found pulsating Christian communities under persecution and came to their aid. Before the MILL HILL missionaries arrived in Cameroon, it was commonplace to see missionaries in native courts, with an array of fervent followers, defending African adherents to Christianity. For example, the description of court proceedings regarding the catechist, Tangwa in Nso, suggests that the proceedings caused a good deal of uproar. In the Tangwa case, fighting between Christians and non-Christians ensued when about 50 Christians, led by Monsignor Plissonneau, accompanied Tangwa to his hearing. About 250 non-Christians were present. The Fon's authority was questioned openly at the hearing.⁵ Events like these gradually inflamed the traditional rulers, who became virulently anti-Christian.

An enclave strong enough to protect the Christians became necessary in the face of this animosity between the traditional rulers and the Christians. The emergence of Christian villages all over the area became commonplace. Christians wishing to live out their faith, or for some ulterior motive, began gravitating gradually towards these enclaves. In the end, they became states within states, with their inhabitants living outside colonial and traditional rule. This book describes the Christian village concept – an illusory pipe dream – and the factors that shaped its dynamics as applied by the British missions in Southern Cameroons. The concept of the Christian village was not new. The Jesuits in Latin America, specifically in Paraguay, had successfully used it for centuries. However, the attempt to found them in

⁵ BNA-Sd 1921/1, In the Provincial Court Case of the Cameroons Province before N.C. Duncan, Divisional Officer, Kumbo, 11.3.1922.

eastern and southern Nigeria failed. The demise of the Christian villages of the MILL HILL missionaries in Southern Cameroons was a result of many factors. From the start, it was apparent that the friction between these enclaves and the colonial and traditional authorities made the success of the entire enterprise precarious.

The MILL HILL missionaries in Southern Cameroons remained at the centre of the Christian villages, becoming the main actors in the controversy between the colonial authorities and traditional rulers. Why and how did these missionaries get so embroiled in the endless squabbles that threatened their very existence in Cameroon? In the 1930s, Church-State relations had reached such a desperate state that an official reprimand was needed to restore order. The missionaries were required to either profess their support for and belief in the British system of indirect rule in Cameroon or leave the territory. There were many reasons for the attitude of the missionaries towards the colonial authorities. Many of the missionaries were of Irish and Dutch origin and the historical intricacies between England and Ireland certainly had a hand in their show of insolence in the face of British rule in Southern Cameroons. Neither the converts nor the missionaries fully appreciated what it meant to convert from the religion of one's ancestors to Christianity. Christianity was a destabilizing force, especially when it came to runaway wives and infant marriages. Philosophically, conversion had deep repercussions for the tribe, which saw its foundations shattered by the alien religion. The whole issue of runaway wives – of royals and commoners alike – taking refuge in the Christian villages troubled both the colonial and traditional authorities. By offering a safe haven to these runaway wives and welcoming women who were outside the traditional male authority in a tribe, the missionaries began sowing within the Christian communities the seeds of their own self-destruction. Records of the wives of Fons escaping into these enclaves, eloping with other men and returning pregnant remained a common subject of several colonial intelligence reports. For example, the demise of Christian village in Njinikom was largely due to the battle between the traditional rulers and the Church over the control of women.

The application of the whole concept of Christian villages without due regard for prevailing norms - ecclesiastical, colonial and traditional - lay at the root of the destruction of the Christian villages, which the missionaries had laboured tirelessly to build and maintain. The management of the Christian enclaves by the missionaries cast dark clouds on Christianity and brought

both catechists and priests to the dock. The most noble of motives guided the missionaries in their arduous and gruelling effort to get the better of traditional rulers and natives, to rout the devil, perceived at the time to be the driving force behind traditional sacrifices and rituals. Good intentions in themselves are not enough and good intentions are not necessarily consistent with practice. They were men of their time, using the tools of their time. They spoke and understood the language of the time to men and women of their time. In some instances, colonial authorities had no option but to expel particular missionaries from the Mandated Territory of Southern Cameroons because they had become a menace to public peace and order.

Although they were men of their time, the conduct of these missionaries in many ways did not follow the prevailing norms set out in the missionary encyclicals of the time. *Maximum Illud* published in 1919 by Pope Benedict XV, a few years before the first band of MILL HILL missionaries landed on the shores of Victoria, proscribed unbecoming missionary conduct and prescribed what was expected of a missionary. It is for succeeding generations of missionaries to see what lessons can be imbibed from the lives and missions of these forbearers of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Over the centuries, missionaries have made frantic efforts in Africa to plant the cross and bring its inhabitants under the yoke of Christ. However, due to a lack of consistent reinforcement over time, these sporadic attempts left behind negligible results that were soon obliterated. The third phase of Africa's systematic evangelisation began in the nineteenth century, a period marked by the extraordinary efforts organized by the great apostles and promoters of the African mission. It was a period of rapid growth, unparalleled by any other missionary endeavours undertaken by the Church in earlier centuries in Africa.¹ The nineteenth century witnessed unprecedented changes on a global scale. There was hardly a place on the earth's surface that was unaffected by this sudden global surge in exploration. Between 1870 and 1900 and especially after 1885, a sudden and striking change occurred in the relations between Europe and the rest of the world. In these years, Europe made its last and most spectacular attempt to dominate the world. No one possible explanation can account for the sudden desire for colonies.

European countries became industrialised and needed to find new markets for their products. Colonies provided not only new markets but also raw materials. Imperialism – the quest for colonies – began as a search for new markets and increased wealth. As Europe became a world power with a network of political and economic interest around the globe, rivalries among European states intensified, transforming most of them into armed camps. Combined with growing feelings of nationalism, imperialistic and militaristic impulses, which created an atmosphere that eventually led to strife and dissension.

Before 1875, the common wisdom was that colonies brought both benefits and problems to a modern state, but, after that year, western thinking abruptly changed. Europe's industrialised states began to compete for colonies and for trade rights around the world. To maintain their high

¹ John Paul II Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* on the Church in Africa and its Evangelizing No.30.

standards of living, they had to find new markets in underdeveloped areas, where they could invest capital and find cheap sources of raw materials. Given these needs, the continent of Africa became the final destination of the imperialistic ambition of western nations.

As late as 1850, people still spoke of Africa as the Dark Continent; by 1914, European nations had divided the entire continent, except for Abyssinia and Liberia. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the bravery of explorers like the Scottish missionary, Dr. Livingstone, opened up the centre of Africa to western influence and control. Very quickly, the main European powers began to seize portions of these lands as colonies and claim surrounding territories as their spheres of influence. Western technological superiority made it possible for Europe to explore, discover and conquer militarily, politically and culturally the indigenous civilizations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. From the destruction of the Aztec empires in Latin America to the Zulu Empire in South Africa, no land was remote enough to escape the notice of Britain, France, Portugal, Spain, Belgium and Germany. These western European nations exported their languages, customs, religions and philosophies to parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Even cultures that seemed resilient appeared very vulnerable in the face of whatever was western.

From the 15th to 19th centuries, European technological advancement made it possible for Europe to master the known lands of the earth. In the 15th century, the Portuguese invented the caravel to explore along the West African coast and into the Atlantic Ocean. In the early 1930s, John Laird designed two paddle steamers. In 1884, Hiram Maxim demonstrated a perfectly reliable machine gun in which the initial pulling of the trigger made the gun fire completely automatically until the trigger was released. In the 19th century, some European nations adopted the compass. These three inventions, instruments of travel, conquest and direction, gave Europe technological leverage over the rest of the world. Countries that had had long and well-established political, social and religious traditions, such as China, India and Japan, had to contend with the westernizing mission of Europe. Owing to their numerical strength and ability to ward off complete colonial subjugation, these peoples were largely able to maintain their cherished cultural practices. However it is true that no culture in the world has completely escaped the intruding influence of western culture, religion, language and philosophy.

By 1850, many European countries had acquired the status of colonial masters. Britain and France were in the forefront. Countries as well as individuals had carved out spheres of influence in Africa. Germany under Bismarck, however, refused to become entangled in this craze for colonies. Not only did Bismarck believe that Germany's interest lay in Europe, he was also anxious not to provoke Britain unnecessarily. To gain colonies would mean building a German navy strong enough to defend its waters, fend off aggressors and bully potential competitors. The creation of a German naval force would have attracted the wrath of Britain and Bismarck was unwilling to upset the delicate balance of power. For this reason, Germany stood aloof, maintaining a safe distance from the squabbles among European powers in their quest for colonies.

However, unable to resist the pressure brought to bear by events, the chancellor was forced to relent. Pressure on him came from the German African Society, formed in 1878 and the German colonial league, formed four years later in 1882. Both organizations encouraged Bismarck to make claims in Africa as other nations had done. Unfortunately for Bismarck, his reign saw the expansion of German industry, a 43 per cent increase in the population of Germany, the building of the railway, which encouraged rural-urban migration and more and more Germans crossing the Atlantic to open up trade with the Middle East and the Far East. Bismarck was not keen on entering the colonial race largely because he did not want to challenge Britain by sea. With more and more prospects for prosperity, many Germans seemed to see no limit to what their nation could achieve. Bismarck had no option other than to overhaul his ideas. Thus, economic expansion put Germany forward as a participant in the race for colonies overseas.

Anxious at all cost not to upset the system of European alliances by offending other nations, Bismarck decided to call conferences in Berlin in November 1884 to discuss all the problems that the scramble for Africa was causing. Cameroon gradually came into focus as a German sphere of influence owing to the fact that German industrialists, hungry for profit, had already invested capital there. For example, Carl Woermann of Hamburg established the first German trading firm on the coast of Cameroon in 1868 and Johann Thornahlen and J. Jantzen established the second in 1875.

The Intricacies of Early Missionary Manoeuvres in Cameroon

In Cameroon, the history of evangelisation went hand in hand with the history of colonization. In fact, missionaries and colonialists were strange bedfellows from the beginning. The evangelisation of Cameroon started in 1840 when the first group of Baptist missionaries landed in Cameroon, all the way from Jamaica. In the beginning of evangelisation, Cameroon was not a colony of any European power. In fact, non-European missionary presence in the country was initiated and kept alive by trading companies such as the German Woerman and the British Amba Bay trading companies. Because of the various European companies in the territory and the absence of any official and internationally recognized control of the entire territory, missionaries were able to take advantage of these loopholes and the open-mindedness of the chiefs, to undertake the work of evangelisation. However, as time went on, the free leeway in Cameroon of missionaries from many nations was completely curtailed. Beginning with the German annexation, the history of evangelisation was marked with controversy. Because of nationalistic tendencies, linguistic and denominational squabbles and schisms, the Christian missionary enterprise in Cameroon created obstacles for itself. The Protestant missionaries preceded the Catholic missionaries by almost half a century.

In the few years before the annexation of Cameroon by Germany, many British missionaries competed with the French to lure their countries to annex Cameroon. They wrote letters in the name of the local traditional authorities requesting annexation. While Britain and France showed interest in colonising Cameroon, it was however half-hearted and minimal. The year 1884 saw a flurry of decisive activities by the German government. In February 1884, Dr Gustav Nachtigal was appointed by the German Government to head a mission to Cameroon and Fernando Po. The purpose of the mission was to study German trade and the prospects of a consular service and coaling station in the area. In Lisbon, on his way to Cameroon, he was given new and definite instructions to annex Cameroon. On Monday July 14, 1884, Johannes Voss officially handed the treaties he had negotiated with the chiefs to Nachtigal, who proclaimed the annexation and hoisted the German flag in Cameroon. The British Consul, Edward H. Hewett, acting on

instructions from the colonial office in London, arrived in Cameroon on July 19, 1884 – four days after the treaties with Germany had been concluded.²

The attitude of the German Government towards the activities of the Catholic Missionary Order in Cameroon and in the colonies in general was influenced by the German foreign policy under Otto Von Bismarck. Bismarck, the German chancellor, was responsible for the course of missionary action in Cameroon. He had a phobia and a general dislike for Jesuits and all that was Jesuit.³ This was the reason why the request made by the Holy Ghost Fathers to set up a missionary post in Cameroon was denied. For him, all Catholic missionaries were more or less Jesuit in character and spirit. However, with the passage of time, the German government had to relax the conditions under which they would accept missionaries into their colonies. They stipulated that missionaries had to be of German nationality, their superiors had to be German and reside in Germany or a German controlled territory and their superiors had to refuse all directives and interference from outside. Bismarck was unable to find a religious order that would satisfy all the criteria to the letter. Since 1622, Catholic missionary activity has been under the direction of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fidei*) in Rome.⁴ The Missionary Order that finally won the bid to evangelize this German colony was not founded by a German and, therefore, in its internal hierarchical structure and by virtue of the international missionary perspective, owed some allegiance to those who had been mandated to direct the missionary activity throughout

²V.G. Fanson (1989) *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges Volume 2, The Colonial and Post-Colonial Periods*, MacMillan Cameroon.

³The Jesuits were founded by Ignatius of Loyola just before the Counter-Reformation, a movement whose purpose was to reform the Catholic Church from within and to counter the Protestant Reformers, whose teachings were spreading throughout Catholic Europe. As part of their service to the Roman Church, the Jesuits encouraged people to continue their obedience to scripture as interpreted by Catholic doctrine.

⁴Founded in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV's bull *Inscrutabili Divinae*, the body was charged with fostering the spread of Catholicism and with the regulation of Catholic ecclesiastical affairs in non-Catholic countries.

the entire known world. The Pallotines were the first Catholic Missionary Order to undertake the work of evangelisation in Cameroon.⁵

When the German Empire became the colonial power of Cameroon (then Kamerun) in 1884, French Catholic groups were denied permission to set up a mission in the territory.⁶ The Germans were not eager to allow Catholics in at all, let alone foreign ones. They relented two years later when the German and Swiss-run Pallotines requested entry. It is important to examine the situation that preceded their coming. A great deal of controversy preceded the coming of the Pallotine missionaries to Cameroon. The first Catholic Missionary Orders that requested to work in Cameroon shortly after the German annexation were the French Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Holy Heart of Mary Immaculate. The German government refused to grant this Missionary Order permission to establish missions in the territory for two related reasons: first, they were French and might work

⁵ Saint Vincent Pallotti, an Italian ecclesiastic who was born in Rome on April 21, 1795, founded the Pallotine missionary order. He was the founder of the Pious Society of Missions. His early studies were made at the Pious Schools of San Pantaleone and he passed to the Roman College from there. At the age of sixteen, he resolved to become a priest and was eventually ordained on May 16, 1820.

Vincenzo Pallotti worked selflessly looking after the poor in the urban areas of the city for most of his life. He had an intense devotion to the mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity and to the Virgin Mary. He longed to send missionaries to other parts of the world and, consequently, founded the Union of Catholic Apostolate, the Society of the Catholic Apostolate that became the Pious Society of Missions. He strongly believed in the spirit of St. Paul. Like all good Catholics of the time, he was influenced by the theology of mission and salvation, the idea that God wanted to save all people. He believed salvation could only be found in the Catholic Church and it was his intention to start a Catholic Apostolic Society. Although his visionary desire to unite the factions in the Church and encourage lay apostolic activity did not bear fruit within his lifetime, he did his utmost to encourage this vision in others.

⁶ The name “Kamerun” is spelled differently depending on the colonial period in question. Under the German colonial period, it is spelled “Kamerun”. Under the British period, it is known as “Cameroons” and its French appellation is “Cameroun”.

against German interest; second, they were Jesuit and the Jesuits tended toward unquestioning and total obedience to their superiors.

In 1889, the Pallotine missionaries requested to come to Cameroon. After a very careful investigation and thorough study of the Order's constitution, the government reluctantly granted permission. This came after Bismarck had visited East Africa and learned of the good work that Catholic missionaries were doing there. In granting permission, the government set several conditions under which they were to operate in the colony. These conditions were as follows: that the Basel mission not object to their coming, that only German missionaries of the Order be sent to the colony, that the Order must keep out of the mission territory of the Basel mission, that there be no foreign control or interference in the Order's work in the colony and that the Order must use the German language in the colony. The Pallotines accepted these conditions and were ready to establish a Pallotine mission house and a training school in Limburg, Germany. In 1890, the Basel mission removed their objections to Catholic missionaries coming to Cameroon, so long as they agreed to work only in regions not under their control. Permission came with the following conditions: the Pallotines were not to compete directly with the already established Protestant Basel Mission, they were to accept no orders from any non-German authority, they were to employ only German or African staff and they were to use and teach only the German language.

It is for this reason that the German Catholic missionaries did not follow the German colonial authorities immediately to Cameroon. Reluctantly and grudgingly, it took the German government close to six years to lift the ban on Catholic missionaries in Cameroon. Historically, this has not always been the scenario. Throughout history, Catholic missionaries followed their compatriots to the colonies. However, unlike most colonising European countries in the past, Germany had ceased to be predominantly Catholic. Not only was Germany not predominantly Catholic, it had institutionally evolved a subtle and sometimes open anti-Catholic feeling.

As was the case with Asia and Latin America in the sixteenth century, the evangelisation of Africa on a large scale was only possible in the era of the colonization of Africa. It was under these circumstances that German missionaries arrived in Cameroon. The German colonial enterprise in Cameroon served as a vehicle for the evangelisation of the territory. The introduction of the German Pallotine Fathers and later the Sacred Heart

Fathers in Cameroon was a direct consequence of German rule in Cameroon. It was in 1884 that the German formal annexation of Cameroon finally became a reality. However, behind the scene, missionaries, in defiance to the national spheres of influence, were eager to cast their nets into the deep. Applications from various Catholic missionary organizations to evangelize in Cameroon were systematically turned down until 1890 when the German government was forced to relent following the demise of Bismarck.

In 1883, a year before the German annexation of Cameroon, two French missionaries of the Holy Ghost Fathers working in Gabon visited Cameroon with the aim of buying land to set up mission stations. Shortly after the annexation of Cameroon in 1885, Nachtigal invited the French Holy Ghost Fathers to come to Cameroon. However, in 1885, with the arrival of Governor Von Soden, the romance ended abruptly and on a sad note. These attempts by the French Holy Ghost Fathers to settle in Cameroon were futile. In November of the same year, Bismarck categorically objected to the admission of the French missionaries in Cameroon in a speech at the Reichstag. The German foreign policy towards Catholic missions in Cameroon was a direct result of the turbulent relations with the Church in Germany. To understand why Bismarck felt threatened by the Catholic Church, it is necessary to examine briefly this period of German history.

Between 1840 and 1870, Italy became a united nation. This meant that the Pope, who for centuries had ruled the Papal States in central Italy, now found himself the ruler of a tiny area around his Vatican palace in Rome. Pius IX was determined to show that this loss of territory made no difference to his position as head of the Catholic Church. Accordingly, in July 1870, he issued a series of Vatican Decrees, the most famous of which was the doctrine of papal infallibility. The First Vatican Council headed by and heavily influenced by the Pope, promulgated two decrees, *Dei Filius* and *Pastor Aeternus*, the latter of which decreed papal Infallibility. It is because of this second decree that this Council is so well known. In simple terms, papal infallibility meant that, when the Pope spoke on behalf of the Church, his word could not be questioned; and all good Catholics must accept his views and his decisions. In addition, the Vatican Decrees stated that it was the duty of the state to enforce all decisions of the papacy. Bismarck at once saw that the claims of Pope Pius IX could be a direct challenge to the one powerful state over which he ruled. Following the declaration of Papal

infallibility, the German government became very unsure about the German Catholics whose allegiance to the papacy was too strong. If the pope and Bismarck disagreed, which one would a German Catholic obey? It should be noted that one third of the German population was Catholic.



Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898)

Trouble began when German Bishops demanded the dismissal of all teachers who did not support the Pope's decrees. Soon afterwards, the Archbishop of Cologne insisted on the removal of four professors at the University of Bonn. Bismarck decided to resist. Behind him were national liberals and free thinkers as well as members of the Reichstag who were keen Protestants. He was also encouraged by the fact that many Roman Catholic

intellectuals at the university opposed the Pope. He decided to put the Prussian Minister of Education, Paul Ludwig Adalbert Falk in charge of the struggle, knowing that Falk could be held responsible if things went wrong⁷.

In 1873, Falk issued the May Laws and other laws followed in the next two years. Following the implementation of the May Laws, the Jesuits, the great teaching order of priests, were expelled from Germany. No priest was allowed to inspect a school or a Church. Colleges had to have their examinations set by the state. The registration of births, marriages and deaths were taken out of the hands of the Church and given to state officers. Bismarck went further to exasperate the papacy by making civil marriages legal, thus reducing to a certain extent the control of the church over family matters. Cardinals and Archbishops, applauded by the congregations, defied the law and went to prison. By 1870, some 1,300 parishes had no priests.

⁷ In 1872 he was made minister of education and in connection with Otto von Bismarck's policy of the *Kulturkampf* he was responsible for the May Laws or Falk Laws against the Catholics. In 1879 his position became untenable, owing to the death of Pope Pius IX and the change of German policy with regard to the Vatican and he resigned his office, but retained his seat in the Reichstag until 1882. Pope Pius IX (13 May 1792 – 7 February 1878), born Giovanni Maria Mastai-Ferretti, was the longest-reigning elected Pope in the history of the Catholic Church, serving from 16 June 1846 until his death, a period of nearly 32 years. During his pontificate, he convened the First Vatican Council in 1869, which decreed papal infallibility. The Pope defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, meaning that Mary was conceived without original sin. Pius IX also granted the Marian title of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, a famous Byzantine icon from Crete entrusted to the Redemptorist priests. In addition to this, Pius IX was also the last Pope to rule as the Sovereign of the Papal States, which fell completely to Italian nationalist armies by 1870 and were incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy. He was beatified in 2000.



Pope Pius IX

Bismarck had gravely miscalculated, however, when he believed that the German Catholics would submit easily. Bismarck was alarmed by the growth of the Catholic Centre Party in the Reichstag whose votes he needed to support his foreign policy. His chance to reverse the situation and make peace with the Church came in February 1878 when Pope Pius IX died and was succeeded by Pope Leo XIII, a far easier man to deal with. A year later, in March 1879, Bismarck held a secret interview with Windthorst at which they came to terms. In return for calling off the Kulturkampf,⁸ the centre

⁸Kulturkampf was actually the German struggle for civilisation. At a time when European nations were shaping their destiny in a pragmatic and decisive manner, prime movers had to decide which direction the German civilisation would take. Many nations in Europe in their forward march to human and material development saw the Catholic Church as an obstacle. The rise in secularism, the removal of the Church from secular life and national independence of these new nation states in Europe were the new ideals in the 19th century. Countries that had thrown Catholicism off their backs were the first to become materially advanced.

party would support Bismarck's policy in other matters. The hated Falk was dismissed and made to appear as a scapegoat for Bismarck's failure. Gradually the May Laws were withdrawn and Bismarck made peace with the new Pope. All Religious Orders of the Catholic Church were allowed to function in Germany and the Catholic Church was allowed complete control of the education of its own priesthood. On the other hand, it did not regain its right to inspect state schools.

Evangelisation and Early History of Cameroon

In May 1889, following the normalisation of relations between the Papacy and Germany, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith in Rome placed a memorandum before the German government. It indicated the availability of the German Pallotine Fathers to take over the evangelisation of Cameroon, the creation of a new vicariate of Cameroon and the consent of the Bishop of Munster to set up a mission centre in his Diocese for the Pallotine Fathers. On March 18, 1890, Rome created the apostolic prefecture of Cameroon and confided it to the Pallotine Fathers. In July of the same year, Henri Vieter was nominated as First Prefect of Cameroon. In October, he and seven companions arrived in Cameroon. On October 8, 1890, the German Pallotine Fathers set up their first mission station at Marienburg, consecrating Cameroon to Mary, Queen of the Apostles.⁹

At the invitation of the Pallotine missionaries, on November 28, 1912, missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus arrived in the colony to cooperate with them in carrying the Catholic faith into the interior and Grasslands of Cameroon. The Order of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was founded by Father Leon Dehon. He was born on March 14, 1843, in La Capelle, France. His father, Alexandre Jules Dehon, was a forthright and virtuous man, although he had become a nominal Christian, having ceased to practice his religion. The dream to see his son scale the heights of success made him to do all in his power to educate his son. An untiring worker, who avoided all forms of prodigality, toeing the path of frugality, he spared no expenses to pay for his son's education. Like the pious men of all times,

⁹ Ndi Anthony Mbunwe (1983), *MILL HILL Missionaries and the State in Southern Cameroons, 1922-1962*, London.

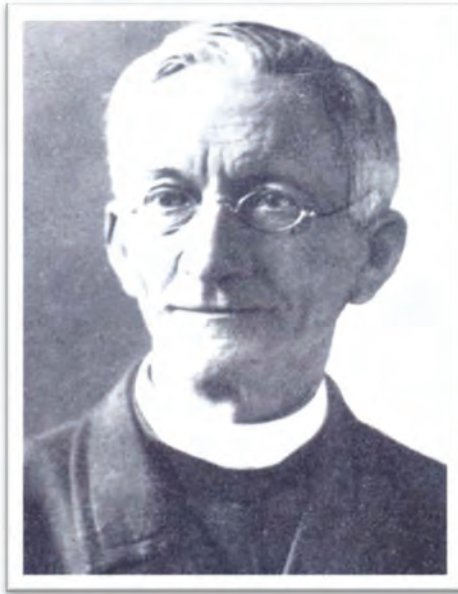
Leon's spiritual awakening was because of his mother's piety. She was a woman of great piety, dedicated to all kinds of good works, with a deep compassion for the poor and unfortunate. His mother prepared the young Leon for his first Holy Communion, which he received on June 4, 1854. His devotion to the Sacred Heart, a name that became the name of the congregation he was to found, was predominantly a trait he had inherited from his mother. At fourteen, Leon Dehon resolved to become a priest.

In 1859, he registered as a student in the university, but his hopes were completely elsewhere. His Father's wish was for his son to become a lawyer and qualify to the bar. Despite this divergence in views, Leon pursued his university studies in Paris with single-minded devotion. In 1862, he qualified as a lawyer and joined the bar. However, the thought of becoming a priest did not leave him. On October 25, 1865, Leon Dehon entered the French seminary of St. Chiara in Rome as the final and decisive step in making his lifetime ambition real. He was ordained on December 19, 1868, in the Cathedral Church of St. John Lateran. In November 1871, Father Dehon became curate in the parish of St. Quentin in the diocese of Soissons. It was from St. Quentin that the idea of founding a Missionary Order began to take root. The group, which he later founded, interlaced together the devotion to the Sacred and the name of the first parish where he was a curate.

The First Sacred Heart of Jesus Missionaries

When The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fidei) and the Civil Authority called for missionaries to undertake the evangelisation of the upper Congo, Father Dehon saw it as a sign of divine providence to realise his dream. Congo remained an outlandish area even for European explorers. Like other vast areas of the tropical rainforest, it had literally become the Whiteman's grave. Initial missionary incursions proved deadly. It seemed exceedingly difficult for foreigners to avoid deadly fevers. However, these conditions did not discourage merchants in search of profit, or missionaries in search of new areas to plant the Cross and bring the inhabitants to submit to the demands of the gospel.

When the missionaries from St. Quentin arrived in Cameroon, they were directed to explore the interior of the country. It is for this reason that missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus became the bearers of the gospel in



the grasslands of Cameroon. They took over the station in Mamfe from the Pallotine Missionaries and opened others in Shisong and Kom in 1912 and 1913 respectively. All over the world, missionaries of different orders tended to secure specific territories and jealously keep others out. This was to avoid squabbles emanating from differences in each order's approach to mission policy. This explains in part why the Sacred Heart Fathers concentrated on the interior, leaving the rest of the

**Father Leon Dehon Founder of the Missionaries
of the sacred Heart of Jesus**

territories to other Missionary Orders. "In this connection, the preaching of the gospel can be brought more immediately and more effectively to everyone in an area if more mission stations and posts are established as soon as it is practicable to do so. Then, when the time comes to divide the mission, these will be ready to serve as centres for new Vicariates and Prefectures. While we are on this subject, we wish to single out for commendation some Vicars Apostolic who have richly earned it: those who have kept this future development steadily in mind and are constantly engaged in the work of readying new provinces for the kingdom of God. If they find that their own order or congregation is not supplying enough

manpower for the task, they are perfectly willing to call in helpers from other religious groups.”¹⁰

The colonization of Cameroon was a gradual process. Following the signing of the annexation treaties with the kings of the coastal regions, the chiefs, oblivious of the consequences, submitted to the colonising power, Germany. These chiefs were familiar with European traders, industrialists and plantation builders and submitted not under duress but with alacrity. They were consumed with eager longings to be numbered among the colonised people of the world. Between 1875 and 1880, reports reaching Europe from Cameroon about the political situation on the Cameroon coast implied a trend towards instability. The kings and chiefs were finding it extremely difficult to govern their own people. According to English Baptist missionaries in Victoria and Douala, every dispute, particularly between the chiefs or local traders in Douala, Bimbia and Tiko, led to war and a great loss of life. In addition, commercial rivalry between the rival village politics and between European and African traders was a source of instability, making it difficult for the chiefs to rule their own people.

Subjugation of the Grass Landers

Originally, the chiefs had intended to have the following clauses enshrined in the treaty: the right to continue to own their land, towns and domestic animals like dogs; the right to and respect for their traditional system of marriage; and the right to freedom from arbitrary arrests, beatings and detention. Emil Schultze endorsed these clauses as acceptable to the Germans before they were submitted to Nachtigal for final approval. However, the actual treaty of annexation that was prepared for signature by the Germans and the chiefs did not contain all the clauses that the chiefs had submitted.¹¹ On July 12, 1884, the treaty was signed on the side of the African chiefs by King Bell, King Akwa and a number of their Duala¹² footnote reference absent subjects and a couple of German subjects. All non-German foreign citizens withdrew from Cameroon.

¹⁰ Benedict XV no. 11

¹¹V.G. Fanso (1989) *Cameroon History for Schools and Colleges Volume 2 Colonial and Post-Colonial periods*. MacMillan Publishers Cameroon. p 16.

The Germans did not intend to stick to the terms of the annexation treaty. They were determined to disregard almost every clause of the treaty that guaranteed the protection of the rights of the colonised people. Another controversial issue was the rights of chiefdoms that had no knowledge of the treaty signed by the coastal chiefs. It is for this reason that German attempts to penetrate and subjugate the people of the Grass Fields met with stiff resistance, resulting in huge human costs on both the European and African sides.

The hinterland theory, which loomed large in the background during the Berlin conference of 1884-1885, was the basis on which the German explorers exploited the people of hinterlands. The hinterland theory stipulated, in principle, that any power in control of any portion of the African coastland had the right to acquire the hinterland from which it derived its exports and within which it distributed its exports. Article VI of the Berlin Act, stated that European traders, missionaries and other agents should have free access to the interior of Africa so that the slave trade and slavery should finally be crushed and the benefits of European civilisation made freely available to its entire people.

It was with this frame of mind that the Germans launched punitive and barbaric expeditions in the Grass Fields, bringing to submission rebel chiefdoms. The German aims were very precise and African chiefs had no option. German rule in the Grass Fields was attained at a high cost, grave enough to alter population dynamics for years to come. With the establishment of the 'Bezirk' headquarters, regular officers were posted there and the pacification policy was further pursued. Strümpell became the first head of the station and carried out some punitive expeditions. Others such as Pavel, Glauning, Hirtler, Adametz and Werner systematically explored the region, subjugating tribal groups. Between 1901 and 1913, punitive expeditions took over 2500 prisoners and over 2000 were killed in the fighting.¹³ Colonial authorities cleared the way for missionaries and early experience with German colonial officers facilitated missionary work. The colonial authorities forcefully imposed their rule and presence. However, the missionaries were required to negotiate their entry in any given community,

¹³ Paul Nchoji Nkwi (1989) *The German Presence in the Western Grassfields 1891-1913, A German Colonial Account*- Leiden: African Studies Centre -111. Research reports / African Studies Centre; no. 37.

peacefully requesting land to settle and pleading with the people to send their children to school to learn what mysteries were hidden in the Whiteman's books.

Generally, the missionaries were peacefully received in the localities. The Fons and chiefs of the Grass Fields had learnt, however, that permission was no longer a *sine qua non* condition for foreigners to operate in one's territory. After the bitter experiences with the Germans, the Fons of Kom and Nso had learnt this the hard way. On February 11, 1902, Pavel filed a report from Banyo, giving a description of his journey from Bali to Banyo.



“Leaving Bali on January 8 with 5 officers, 150 black soldiers and 600 carriers, the expedition received a warm reception at Bambui where the Fon of Kom and the chiefs of Bambili, Bambui and Mejang had gathered to welcome him. Again, the chiefs rejoiced over the

German trained Militia from Bali. It was with such forces that Germans were able to subdue the rest of the Fondoms of the Grassfields.

Bafut
defeat

and pledged to supply both labour and provisions to the new station. Bafut appears to have been a nuisance in the region because of its frequent predatory raids. The expedition moved on to Bamesing and Babungo where they received similar pledges from chiefs. On December 15, it reached Kumbo and the Fon of Nso declared his recognition of German sovereignty. The Germans interpreted this immediate declaration of total submission as the result of the humiliating defeat of Bafut. That punitive action on Bafut had proven enormously helpful.¹⁴

Many of the chiefs had overestimated German goodwill and underestimated German military might when they freely pledged their sovereignty to Germany. Harsh demands alienated the chiefs, provoking indigenous rebuffs that in turn resulted in military reprisals against insolent chiefs. The Fon of Nso's refusal to comply with German demands provoked a full-scale war in 1906. Several Nso men and women were taken prisoners. On May 10, a patrol of the sixth Company was involved in a violent clash in which 30 people were killed on the enemy's side. The Fon was wounded but escaped. On May 28, the first Nso people arrived to ask for peace and

¹⁴ Paul Nchoji Nkwi (1989) op. Cit.

hostilities stopped. From June 4 to 6, patrols were sent out because the negotiations were dragging on too long. The chief councillor of the Fon of Nso only arrived on June 5 to ask for peace.¹⁵ The apparent allegiance of Kom to the colonial rulers was short-lived. In 1904, Fon Yu rejected the German demands for labour, provoking a German military invasion of Kom. The German offensive was determined and bitter: all villages on their path were burned down completely, the palace at Laikom was occupied and later burnt and crops were destroyed. Fon Yu went into hiding and, after seven months of battle, was persuaded in 1905 to sign a peace pact with the German aggressor, thereby placing Kom under German administration. A shortage of old men in Kom in the 1920s is testimony to the severity of the confrontation between the Germans and the Kom people: the men fled during the German offensive and died of cold and hunger.¹⁶

It was under these brutal, barbaric and vicious circumstances that the third wave of evangelisation began in earnest. Up to the 1800s, even though there were many religious institutes that were missionary in outlook and character, Africa remained largely an unexplored area for them. The evangelisation of China and Latin America was a natural consequence of colonialism. Jesuit missionaries, who championed and pioneered primary evangelisation of Asia and Latin America, followed the ships of their own nations, which provided both the means and protection for their mission. When a Portuguese explorer sailed onto the shores of an island off the coast of India in 1500, eight Franciscans landed with him. The Spanish missionaries went in great numbers to the New World, following the explorers and soldiers whose purpose was conquest. Displaying a white standard ornamented with the purple cross of the divine Redeemer, the ships that transported the intrepid explorers bound for the western shores and islands of Africa carried missionaries. Henry the Navigator supported the colonial and sacred expeditions, so the missionaries could subject the barbarians to the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶ Jacqueline de Vries (1998) Catholic Mission, Colonial Government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon) African Studies Centre Research Report 56/1998

¹⁷ Pius XII, *Saeculo Exeunte Octavo*, Encyclical letter on the eighteen century of the independence of Portugal no.6

It was the same with the prince of the Portuguese explorers, Vasco Da Gama, who, weighing anchor to begin his fortunate trip to India, had with him two religious men of the Order of the Most Holy Trinity. One of them, after bringing the light of the gospel to India with apostolic zeal, suffered martyrdom. However, just as in all ages of the Church, so also at that time and in those far distant regions, the blood of this martyr and of the other heroic missionaries of Portugal became the seed of Christianity. Their illustrious example greatly inspired the Catholic world, including the spirited citizens of Portugal, to promote more widely the works of the apostolate.¹⁸

Pioneer Missionaries in the Grass Fields of North-West

The Basel mission was established for the first time in the Grass Fields in 1903 after missionaries Schuier, Keiler and Spellenburg made a reconnaissance journey to Bali in 1902. As far back as that time, the missionaries lamented the fact¹⁹ that after 14 years of European visits to Bali



“one does not very much feel the advance of European culture” except that Pidgin English was spoken and some trade was going on in European imported objects. Nevertheless, the missionaries were definitely impressed with their first contact in the Grass Fields. “Nowhere before had I been as much aware of the mission’s cultural importance and of the

Importance of its action in the upbringing of a people as I was in this circumstance. What would become of our colonies without the

Fon Galega II of Bali

missions? I kept asking myself this question without trying to come up with an answer. But it is certain that after a short period of our activities among the Balis, there would be remarkable progress in cultural relations. As an example, we can mention the Bakoko and

¹⁸Ibid. no.7

¹⁹STEINER, “Im lande der Bau” In: *Evangelisches Missions Magazin*, 1903 in Paul Nchoji Nkwi(1989) The German Presence in the Western Grassfields 1891-1913 A German Colonial Account- Leiden: African Studies Centre -111. - Research reports / African Studies Centre.

Malimba brutes amongst whom the Basel mission worked for eleven years what a cultural blessing these people had.”²⁰

A school was opened on December 1, 1903, with 63 boys, including three sons of the Fon of Bali and sons of neighbouring chiefs. The number soon increased to 150. The 1906 report of missionary efforts recounts further attempts to expand their influence in the Grass Fields. The school was expanded with the support of the Fon of Bali and missionary Göshing brought a printing press to print, bind and distribute biblical and school material. The hanging of the chief of Bababju was reported by the missionaries, demonstrating their capacity to win over Bali and other chiefs in the neighbourhood from hostile behaviour. Attempts were made from Bali to create a mission station in Bamum after missionary Stolz visited Fouban. Njoya was about 26 years old. Despite Njoya’s hesitation, the Basel mission was permitted to set up a station in Bamum, which according to the missionaries was to check the irresistible advance of Islam.

The third and most remarkable phase of the introduction of Christianity in Africa was characterised by missionary activity backed by an effective colonial presence on the ground. The nineteenth century witnessed the arrival of empire builders, explorers, missionaries and traders simultaneously with colonial occupation, which bequeathed an image of Christianity tinted by colonial rule. The years following the colonization of Africa saw the last of the unknown territories. These years also saw the missionaries of the Church following the newly blazed trails into the interior. One could rightly say that it was difficult to find an island remote enough to escape the vigilance and the energy of the missionaries. Colonialism and Christianity combined into a lethal force, eroding long standing cultural practices. These strange bedfellows, often at loggerheads, perpetually existing in acrimony, were in the eyes of some traditional authorities, birds of the same feather with one ambition.

German Colonization and Christianity

From 1884 until the defeat of Germany in the First World War, Cameroon was officially a German protectorate, Kamerun.²¹ Native

²⁰ Ibid.

resistance to German rule was so rife that even when the First World War broke out in 1914, thirty years later, German authority was still not firmly established in large parts of the territory. All forms of passive and armed confrontation badgered the German administration throughout its presence in Cameroon. The Bamenda Grassfields provided the German colonizers with heavy armed resistance. From 1888 until 1912, German rule in the Grass Fields was characterized by ruthless military incursions. Large parts of the Grass Fields were brought under German rule as late as 1907, seven years before the Germans were expelled from Cameroon.

Germany's aim in colonizing Cameroon was above all an economic one. Unlike her successors, Britain and France, who were at least nominally subject to conditions stipulated by the League of Nations, Germany had no benevolent motives whatsoever in its colonizing enterprise, nor did it attempt to cloak its economic interests in terms of a civilizing mission. This purely economic aim inevitably had repercussions on the form of government and the relationship with indigenes. The German presence in Cameroon ended due to the outbreak of the First World War, which prompted Britain and France to invade the territory. The greatly outnumbered German forces were forced to retreat from Cameroon in December 1915, when Colonel Zimmerman fled to Spanish Guinea with most of the German troops.²² The ensuing confinement of the German troops and their supporters on the island of Fernando Po constitutes an important episode in Cameroonian colonial history. By German estimates, almost 15,000 people made the exodus from Cameroon, slightly less than 1000 of them Europeans.²³

The policy adopted by German colonial authorities with regard to missions was tailored to suit the overall aim of German colonization.

²¹ Britain administered Cameroon as an integral part of the colony and protectorate of Nigeria, which was divided for administrative purposes into the Northern Group of Provinces or Northern and Southern Nigeria.

²² Stoecker, Helmuth (1986), 'Cameroon 1906-1914.' in H. Stoecker (ed.), *German Imperialism in Africa: From the Beginnings until the Second World War*, London/New York: 161-74. in De Vries Jacqueline (1998) *Catholic Mission, Colonial government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon)* African studies centre.

²³ Quinn, Frederick (1985), 'The Impact of the First World War and its Aftermath on the Beti of Cameroon.' in M.E.P (ed.), *Africa and the First World War*, Basingstoke/London: 171-85.

Missionaries were welcome in the protectorate so long as they contributed to the colonial effort, for example, by providing education in the German language. The lack of government initiative resulted in a near-monopoly on education by missionary organizations. The first missionary organization to concern itself with Cameroon was the English Baptist Mission, which was taken over in 1886 by the Protestant Basel Mission, as the Baptists had encountered difficulties with the German colonial authorities.²⁴ Initially, the Basel Mission was considered by the German colonial administration to be more or less a state Church, hence Catholic missions found it difficult to obtain entry to Cameroon.²⁵ In 1889, the Catholic Pallotine Fathers obtained permission to operate in areas not yet covered by the Basel Mission and established a mission station at Bojongo near the coast. It appears that the German administrators welcomed the establishment of a Catholic Mission at that time because the Basel Mission had failed to provide German-speaking native clerks and agents. The Basel Mission had also encountered problems with the German government because the mission resisted the colonial government's oppressive measures with regard to forced labour and land expropriation.²⁶

²⁴ Ngoh, Victor Julius (1987), *Cameroon 1884 - 1985: A Hundred Years of History*, Yaoundé.

²⁵ Ndi, Anthony Mbunwe (1983), *MILL HILL Missionaries and the State in Southern Cameroons, 1922-1962*, London.

²⁶ Obdeijn, H.L.M. (1983), *The Political Role of Catholic and Protestant Missions in the Colonial Partition of Black Africa, A Bibliographical Essay*, Leiden



The Pallotine Sisters who were expelled from Cameroon in 1916

The Pallotine Fathers identified themselves closely with German colonial policy, teaching in German and supporting policies of enforced labour.²⁷ Until the turn of the century, missionary activity was concentrated along the coast, where plantations had been established. The German missions relied heavily on the support of local catechists. Most of the early Christians in the Bamenda Grass Fields were plantation labourers who had been baptized by the Pallotine Fathers after receiving rigorous religious instruction for two to three years. These catechists taught in schools, prepared catechumens for

²⁷ Ndi, Anthony Mbunwe (1986), 'The Second World War in Southern Cameroons and its Impact on Mission-State Relations, 1939-1950.' in D. Killingray & R. Rathbone (eds.), *Africa and the Second World War*, New York: 204-31. In De Vries, Jacqueline (1998) *Catholic Mission, Colonial government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon)* African studies centre.

baptism, explained the catechism and Bible stories in so-called doctrine classes and led the congregation in prayers. In practice, they ran the whole mission during the absence of ordained priests.²⁸ The outbreak of World War I did not put an end to the German missionary influence in Kom, for the German Schutztruppe in the Bamenda area included three Catholic priests and five brothers.²⁹ In the long run, the influence of these priests was to be far greater than the influence exerted by the pioneer missionaries who had settled at Fujua. Only in 1919 were the Cameroonian soldiers who had been interned in Fernando Po repatriated. In northern Cameroon, German troops maintained control until Garoua was captured by Allied forces in June 1915. As early as September 1914, however, when the Germans had been ousted from Douala, colonial rule in the Bamenda Grass Fields had essentially become a British affair. Eventually, the Treaty of Versailles stipulated that Germany should relinquish all her colonies to the Allied and Associated powers and German Kamerun was divided between Britain and France. This arrangement was ratified in 1922 by the League of Nations.

²⁸ Ndi 1986 op.cit.

²⁹ Nkwi 1976 op. Cit.



Evangelisation under the British

From the fall of Douala in September 1914 to March 1916, Cameroon was ruled as a “condominium” by France and Britain jointly. The problems inherent in such a system necessitated a change in strategy. At least the condominium administration provided for the provisional administration of Cameroon until the Germans were completely expelled. Separate French and British administrative structures were set up in 1916. It was not until July 10, 1919, that the British and French colonial Ministers, Alfred Lord Milner and Monsieur Henri Simon, signed the famous Simon-Milner Declaration recommending the adoption by the League of the final partition of Cameroon.

Intervention of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith

With the departure of the Pallotine Missionaries and the Sacred Heart Missionaries, the future of their missions in the Cameroons became very uncertain. With the establishment of the condominium, the Vatican moved swiftly to open negotiation with the British authorities. On September 20, 1919, Cardinal Gasparri addressed a letter to the British Chargé d'affaires in connection with the British Cameroons Catholic Missions. Among the African Missions from which missionaries of German nationality were expelled, there was in particular the prefecture Apostolic of Adamawa under the charge of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart. The superior of this congregation, Father Leon Dehon, had informed the Holy See of the early dispatch of French Missionaries to the prefecture. At the time of the expulsion, Captain Cook, Commander of the local British forces, had sequestered all the property of the Mission, including 30,000 francs in silver at Kumbo, 5 horses, 20 cows, sheep and implements. The provisional management of the mission had been entrusted to Father Shanahan by 1919.

In bringing the above information to the British chargé d'affaires, Cardinal Gasparri, the Cardinal Secretary of the State to His Holiness, requested him to approach the British Government for the property sequestered by the military to be handed over to the present manager of the mission as had already been done in several analogous cases. In an ordinance to make provision for giving effect to article 438 of the peace with Germany

as to the property of Christian religious missions formerly maintained by the Germans in the British Cameroons, signed on June 28, 1919 “The Allied and Associated powers agreed that where Christian religious missions were being maintained by German societies or persons in the territory belonging to them, or of which the Government is entrusted to them in accordance with the present treaty, the property which these missions or missionary societies possessed, including that of trading societies whose profits were devoted to the support of missions were to be continued to be devoted to missionary purposes. And in order to ensure the due execution of this undertaking, the allied and associated governments were to hand over such property to Boards of Trustees appointed by or approved by the Governments and composed of persons holding the faith of the mission whose property was involved”.³⁰ This board was never constituted because in 1927 the Under Secretary of State decided otherwise. In a letter to Reverend Henry Francis, he wrote, “I am directed by Mr. Secretary Amery to inform you that it has now been decided it will not be necessary to constitute a Board of Trustees for the Ex-German Mission property in the British Cameroons. The Nigerian government proposes to repeal the German Missions ordinance of 1925 and it will then be prepared to approve the vesting of the property of the ex-German Roman Catholic Missions in the St. Joseph’s Society for Foreign Missions and to dispense with the formalities required by vesting in the Board of Trustees.”³¹

G.S. Podevin, District Officer in charge of Bamenda Division, in a memorandum to the Resident of British Cameroons in Buea, said that he had received no intimation or any instructions regarding the intention of the government to permit any continuance of religious propaganda in the Division, but that, owing to a private communication he had received from Father Krafft at Calabar, it appeared that the Roman Catholic Missions were contemplating some activity in the area. Father Krafft had asked Podevin to

³⁰ An Ordinance to make provision for giving effect to article 438 of the peace with Germany as to the property of Christian religious missions formerly maintained by the Germans in the British Cameroons, signed on the June 28, 1919: Article 438 of the Peace Treaty

³¹ BNA-Sd 1916/1, Correspondence from John A. Calder for the Undersecretary to the Reverend Francis F., Superior General of the MILL HILL Missionaries.

advise him about roads and accommodation available at the missions in the Division as he wanted to visit in the near future “part of his flocks roaming without pastors” in conjunction with Father Shanahan. Podevin, in his answer to Father Kraft’s letter, advised him to communicate with the government before undertaking any such expedition, as he was not in a position to give him the necessary authority to do so.

During nearly seventeen years of service in Africa, Podevin had many opportunities to observe the efforts of missionaries and it seemed to him that the Roman Catholics were invariably the most successful and achieved the most satisfactory results in their dealings with natives. Although Podevin was not a Roman Catholic himself, he preferred Catholic Missions to those of any other denomination in any area he had administered. Despite his love for Catholic Missions in general, he recommended that Fathers Krafft and Shanahan be prevented from pursuing their activities in the division “for the time being” upon purely political grounds. Although he appreciated the possibility that such efforts in normal times might be productive and of much good, he maintained that missionary activity in the division should be postponed to a later date. In fact, he recommended that no facilities be granted to religious bodies to establish themselves in the Bamenda Division. He advanced several reasons.

“That Owing to the present unsettled times after the war and with due regard to the very uncertain hold exercised by the British upon the conduct of native affairs in the Cameroons, due principally to inadequate political staff, the immediate post-war years were in his view an inopportune moment to introduce any influence that would minimize or depreciate British efforts in the Cameroons. The consensus of the chiefs was not altogether in favour of the re-establishment of missions. Chiefs he had interviewed affirmed and assured him emphatically that the German missionaries undermined their authority and created many difficulties. These chiefs also informed him that, since the closing of the German missions, these difficulties had largely disappeared and they were able to exercise much more efficient control over their “boys”.³²

³² BNA-Sd 1916/1, Confidential Memorandum from G.S. Podevin, Divisional Officer In charge of Bamenda Division to the Resident British Cameroons, Buea on Recommendations against Re-establishment of the Missions at Present September 8, 1917

The German Missionaries and their agents at Fernando Po were in constant communication with natives in the Division. One letter he (Podevin) had censored- and did not deliver – was addressed to the Head Chief of Bekom. This man requested that the Chief look after his women and repair the government buildings. He said without exaggeration that he had received at least 200 letters and post cards from Fernando Po addressed to natives in this Division since he had been in charge of Bamenda and ex-mission boys wrote the majority of them. Certainly, most of them were written at the instigation of German missionaries and - judging by the handwriting – many were written by the Missionaries themselves. He concluded that, “If the missions were re-opened before a definite conclusion in the war is arrived at and before we know whether this portion of the Cameroons is to be British Territory or not I cannot help thinking that an altogether erroneous impression will be formed by the native mind.”³³

The subject of the property of the German Missions in Cameroon received due attention during the peace treaties. An ordinance was enacted to give effect to article 438 of the treaty that referred to the property of Christian religious missions formerly maintained by Germans in the British Cameroons. Mission here went beyond the narrow definition of Christian missions to include their moveable and immoveable property. The German Missions Ordinance of 1924 stated clearly that:

“Missions included any missionary society or trading society whose profits were devoted to the support of a missionary society. “German national” referred to a person who was a subject or citizen of Germany or who, having at any time been such a subject or citizen, had changed his allegiance as a result of recognition of new States or territorial rearrangements, or naturalized in any British possession or, before the treaty of Peace with Germany came into force, in any Foreign State in accordance with the law thereof and when actually resident therein and did not retain according to the law of Germany the nationality of that State and included an association, company or corporation incorporated under the law of Germany. German mission property meant all property whether moveable or immoveable which on the 10th day of January, 1920, belonged to or was held in trust for a Christian religious mission maintained in Nigeria by a German

³³BNA-Sd 1921/1, Memorandum from G.S. Podevin, Divisional Officer in charge of Bamenda Division, to the Resident of the Cameroon Province.

national. The right to transfer German mission property was vested in the Governor”³⁴.

The same ordinance went on to add that “With the consent of Secretary of State, the Governor could declare every right, title, or interest of any person other than His majesty and other than subsisting rights of way or apparent easements to and in any of the said properties and the benefit of any covenant, agreement or reservation in support of any such right, title or interest to or in any of the said properties to be extinguished and no action or proceeding shall be capable of being taken or proceeded with to enforce the same. It empowered the Governor to transfer all German mission property to trustees appointed by or approved by the Secretary of State and holding the faith of the mission whose property was involved to be held upon such trusts as the Secretary of State may from time to time determine. The Governor could transfer to the trustees any interest in land, being German mission property, for such estate or interest as he may think fit subject to the sanction of the Secretary of State. Any provision of the land registration ordinance to the contrary notwithstanding, any instrument declaring the trusts on which any German mission property was to be held and purporting to be signed by the Secretary of State or the Governor may be registered in the land registry at Lagos”³⁵.

Shanahan’s Reconnaissance Missions to British Cameroons

In the ecclesiastic milieu following the expulsion of the Germans from the territory, the portion of the territory that fell into the British sphere of influence was entrusted to the care of Shanahan in February 1917. A document from Rome appointed him Administrator of the Prefecture of Adamawa. However, owing to persistent ill health, he was unable to make a reconnaissance journey of his new mission territory until late in 1918. It was a vast territory without priests and leadership among Christians who had not been forcefully sent to Fernando Po was in the hands of catechists. At the end of the tour of the territory in his famous 1000 miles journey, he wrote the following in his report to Rome, which struck a firm note of optimism:

³⁴ BNA-Sd 1916/1, German Mission Ordinance, 1924, cited by A.D.A. MacGregoor, Acting Attorney General 23rd of May 1924

³⁵ Ibid. no.6

“Catholicism is still alive in Adamawa. The Christians fully expect to see the priest return to them. They remain devotedly attached to them. Their constancy during the four years of severe trial has been admirable. There is a splendid future before a mission which after two or three years of existence has been able to produce such splendid soul.”³⁶

Adamawa was the part of the Cameroons that adjoined Southern Nigeria and it had been placed under British rule after the Germans were driven out. The missionaries in Adamawa had been German priests of the Sacred Heart Congregation. With their departure, the prefecture was left completely without priests. Shanahan estimated that the trek through Adamawa would take three or four months and cover about a thousand miles through some of the most difficult and rugged terrain on the African continent. It would be even more arduous than the Great Trek of ten years earlier. He was now forty-seven years of age, weakened by long service in the tropics and not fully recovered from his recent illness. None of these factors lessened his determination to carry out his mandate and visit the abandoned missions of Adamawa.

He left Onitsha with an escort of twenty carriers in early December 1918 and marched three hundred miles across the country to the Cameroon’s border which he crossed on December 22. His motorcycle was left behind, as it was worse than useless in the road-less mountains and valleys of Adamawa. Once or twice, he was able to use a canoe and for a few days he experimented none too successfully with a mule. ‘We never became friends, because when I wanted to go one way, it always decided to go the other.’³⁷ For the rest of the thousand miles, he went on foot, walking on rough bush tracks, climbing up steep slopes or slithering down them, wading through shallow streams and being carried across deep ones and swaying on rope bridges across ravines with a drop of hundreds of feet below.

On Christmas Eve, he arrived in Ossidinge where the German priests used to have a mission. They had been in Adamawa only for three years before being expelled and Shanahan was uncertain whether any of the people had become converts, or if they had, whether they remained faithful. His

³⁶Desmond Forristal(1990) *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*, VERITAS Publication

³⁷ Bishop Shanahan quoted in Desmond Forristal(1990) *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*, VERITAS Publication

carriers had scarcely laid down their boxes in the market place when a couple of Catholics discovered who he was and laid his doubts at rest. "They began to dance and sing with joy, clapping their hands wildly and embracing each other. When their first transports were over, they flung themselves on their knees, kissing my feet and the ground before me as though I were a great king. It brought to my mind the way the shepherds of Bethlehem fell down before the divine child and I wished from my heart that I was not so unworthy."³⁸

Those hostile to the Christians had demolished the mission buildings in Ossidinge. Nothing remained. The bricks had crumbled into dust and the site had returned to bush. There was a rumour that the bells had been preserved, but nobody was able to find them. It did not matter. Drums were beaten, horns were blown and messengers were sent to neighbouring villages to summon the people to midnight Mass. A two-roomed rest house was swept and set in order for the Prefect. Behind it, an open-air altar was set up under a palm-leaf shelter and decorated with wild flowers and shrubs. In the moonlight, it looked like a Christmas tree. The congregation for midnight Mass was small. There were the Ibo carriers from Onitsha, a few Catholic traders from the coast towns of Douala and Victoria and a handful of local Catholics and catechumens. They made up in joy what they lacked in numbers. From the consecration of the Mass until the communion, they continually kissed the ground in their tribal greeting for a king. They sang the "Adeste Fideles" with touching fervour. At the end of Mass, they were overjoyed when Shanahan told them that he intended to stay in Ossidinge for a week and that he would turn one of the rooms of the rest house into an oratory with the Blessed Sacrament reserved in it for their adoration.

During the following week, he used Ossidinge as a base, making visits to the surrounding villages during the day and returning home each night. All week long, the little makeshift oratory was never without its group of worshippers, their eyes fastened on the wooden tabernacle. 'We were praying,' they told him, 'that Our Lord will send us priests to stay with us.' Some of them had come from a distance of three or four days' journey over rough and dangerous tracks to receive the sacraments. They told him of the ill-treatment they had been subjected to since the priests had been taken

³⁸ Shanahan's words in Desmond Forristal(1990) *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*, VERITAS Publication p.118

away. The British authorities obviously saw them as a threat because of the ties of loyalty that bound them to the German missionaries. A number of the leading Christians had been taken to Fernando Po and interned there with the Germans. Those who remained were persecuted in various petty ways by the local chiefs at the instigation of the British administration. The churches and schools were closed and in most cases deliberately destroyed. The children of the internees were forced to discard the clothes that marked them out as Christians and these were then distributed among pagan families. In all his travels through the area, Shanahan saw only two Christian girls.

After leaving Ossidinge, he headed west into the mountainous heartland of Adamawa. Some of the Christians travelled with him to show him the way and to attend the Mass with which each new day began. Others met him at various points along the route, sometimes by accident and added themselves to the company. He was deeply moved by these encounters: "Never in my whole life did I experience such emotion as when, on the roads leading to their villages, I met these children of God, with the familiar Christian greeting on their lips, 'Laudetur Jesus Christus'. With what joy they welcomed us! They could not tear themselves from our side and yet we were aliens in race and tongue. With what earnestness they prepared themselves for the sacraments, these poor souls, so loved and protected by God! In addition, in the little hut where the morning Mass was celebrated, real saints were praying. I could not help thinking of the catacombs."³⁹

The steep climb up the escarpment tested him severely. The tracks were rough and narrow, with sheer mountains on one side and plunging ravines on the other. At an altitude of five or six thousand feet, the air became thin and breathing more difficult. Added to the weariness in his legs and the pressure on his lungs, he became aware of growing abdominal pains. But In spite of these difficulties, he pressed on. He was determined to visit every one of the six former German mission stations and as many other villages as he could. On January 6, 1919, he celebrated the Feast of the Epiphany near the village of Bamao on the top of the escarpment. In the darkness of the early morning, he could hear the native drums beating out the message of his arrival and see the lights of the Christians winding along the mountain paths on their way to Mass. The devotion of the little congregation matched that of

³⁹ Shanahan's words in Desmond Forristal(1990) *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*, VERITAS Publication p.120

the Christmas congregation at Ossidinge. As he stood at the altar on that high mountaintop, he felt that he was standing halfway between heaven and earth.

From Bamao he continued in the direction of Bali and was met on the way by one Francis Fongoh. When Francis learnt that the Whiteman was a priest, he was delighted to announce that he himself was a Catholic and he led the group to Bali. The first Mass ever said in the village was celebrated in an abandoned Protestant mission, attended by eight local Catholics. Bamenda was the administrative centre of the area. The British District Officer received him kindly, showing him twenty-two boxes of church furniture taken from the defunct missions. He pushed on, still going west and reached Kumbo, which had been a flourishing mission station four years earlier. The chief was friendly and had been keeping the priests' house in good repair, but the convent, the schools and the catechumens' house had all vanished. He intended to go on to the former station of Wum, to the north of Bamenda, but was unable to do so because of unrest in the area. It was the only one of the six stations that he missed.⁴⁰

South of Bamenda were the missions of Bakom and Babaju. There was no trace left of the mission buildings in either place. Despite this, Shanahan continued his practice of spending a week or two in each station to give time for any Catholics in the area to learn of his presence and come to receive the sacraments. He urged them to meet together in one another's houses on Sundays and to say the Rosary and other prayers until the priests were allowed to come back. Two Christians came to him one day and told him they had travelled three days from their village to see him, a distance of up to a hundred miles. They wanted him to give them absolution from all their sins. When he agreed to do so, they started reeling off a long list of offences, each with a large number of times attached. He tried to stop them as there were others listening, but they said it did not matter as everyone knew about these sins.

They carried on with their list, helping one another with nods of affirmation and occasional prompts. Shanahan grew mystified and suspicious at the number and variety of the offences and began to question them. It soon emerged that they were not just confessing their own sins. They had

⁴⁰ Desmond Forristal(1990) *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*, VERITAS Publication

been sent to confess the sins of all the Christians in their village and to bring them back absolution from the Father. Shanahan was touched by their faith, but taken aback by their theology. Nothing in his seminary lectures had prepared him for this. He decided that it was no time for niceties: "I said to them, 'Tell the people I have given them absolution in the name of Jesus. Tell them to kneel down and say a good act of contrition.' I prayed to the Lord to make the absolution carry. And I believe it did."⁴¹

In one station, he discovered that the teacher-catechists had continued their work in secret after the priests had gone. They had led prayers on Sundays and taught the catechism to children and adult catechumens. They were so well grounded in the faith that Shanahan was able to baptise them. He stayed two weeks in the village and during all that time there was continuous adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the mud house where he was staying. When the time came for him to move on, there was desolation. A loud wail arose from the people as he removed the sacrament from the tabernacle and with dreadful finality blew out the little light.

They followed him down to the riverbank, where a canoe was waiting to bring him on the next stage of his journey. 'Stay with us, Father,' they begged him. 'You brought us Our Lord, how can you take him from us?' He stepped into the canoe; the oarsmen dipped their paddles in the water and started a rhythmic chant as the boat moved out into midstream. Above the sound of their singing, he could still hear the cries of the people on the bank. 'Come back again and bring Our Lord', they called after him. 'Come back again and bring Our Lord.'⁴²

The scene would have moved a far stonier heart than his. But the sadness of partings like this contained hope for the future. The conclusion of his report to Rome struck a firm note of optimism. "Catholicity is still alive in Adamawa. The Christians fully expect to see the priests return to them. They remain devotedly attached to them. Their constancy during the four years of severe trial has been admirable. There is a splendid future before a mission, which has been able to produce such splendid souls after two or three years

⁴¹Story told to Denis Forristal by Father Jordan, When Father Jordan wrote the story he carefully omitted the giving of Absolution owing to the offence it might have caused to the theology of the time.

⁴² Desmond Forristal(1990) *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*, VERITAS Publication

of existence.”⁴³ His optimism was justified. After the peace settlement, Adamawa remained under British administration. The mission was entrusted to an English Congregation, the MILL HILL Missionaries, who built up a flourishing church on the foundations laid by their German predecessors.

It was now March 1919 and Shanahan’s task was finished. In spite of altitude, age and exhaustion and in the face of pain that was becoming more frequent and more intense, he had visited all the stations except the inaccessible Wum. Day after day, he had forced himself to keep going by sheer willpower. With his mission accomplished, he collapsed. He was in the heart of the bush, hundreds of miles from civilisation. Racked by pain, he seemed likely to die. His faithful Ibo bearers saved his life. They managed to carry him the long journey to the seacoast and, after an agonising week, he arrived at the port of Douala in the French part of the Cameroons, where there was a Holy Ghost mission and a hospital. He was taken into the hospital, put to bed and ordered to remain lying flat. He was suffering from an amoebic abscess on the liver, a common and often fatal complication of amoebic dysentery. The abscess could burst at any time, flooding the peritoneum with poison and leading to almost certain death - hence the injunction to lie flat and avoid movement, especially sudden movement.

He endured it for three days while the doctors tried to treat him. Then he decided that lying flat on his back was no life for a missionary. With characteristic impulsiveness, he gripped the bars of his bed and hoisted himself suddenly upwards and out on to the floor. What the doctors had warned about happened. The abscess burst, but, providentially, it burst outwards through the abdominal wall and the poison escaped harmlessly. He was released from hospital and cared for by the French Holy Ghost Fathers, who spoke afterwards of the extraordinary impression he had made on them. As soon as he was strong enough, he took the boat for Calabar. The priests there were shocked at his appearance and he himself feared that his health had been damaged beyond recovery. He even began to speak of the possibility of resigning from the position of Prefect. The others would not hear of it but urged him to return to Europe as soon as possible to recuperate. He was due to go to Europe in any event. As superior of the Southern Nigeria mission, he had been called to attend the General Chapter

⁴³ Shanahan’s Report to Rome in Desmond Forristal(1990) *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*, VERITAS Publication

of the Holy Ghost Congregation. It had been postponed because of the war and was now scheduled to take place at the end of August.

The period from 1916 to 1922 was one of confusion and contradictory colonial policies. British administrators in the Bamenda Division were more or less on their own, receiving only occasional instructions from Lagos, until 1922. At this time, Southern Cameroons was entrusted to the British government as a Mandated Territory by the League of Nations and Indirect Rule was adopted as the official policy for Cameroon. Early British policy was largely determined by the fact that Cameroon fell to Britain as a spoil of war and not as a colonial territory for its own sake. By consequence, the status of the territory was ill-defined in the years after the war and British policy was ad hoc and often contradictory.

Though British rule was not yet official, the English concerned themselves with missionary activities as early as 1916, when the Divisional Officer in Bamenda attempted to convince the Roman Catholic Mission to set up a school where former teachers would be taught English. This move may be considered an anomaly, however, for as the war ended the British policy regarding the re-establishment of the missions in the Bamenda Grass Fields was far more hesitant. During the unsettled first years of Britain's presence in Cameroon, her attitude towards the missions was marked by suspicion and impatience. The initial investigations of the British colonial authorities had revealed that the Fons and other traditional leaders in the Bamenda Grass Fields were, overall, not enthusiastic about the representatives of the new religion, be they European or Cameroonian. What had begun as an enticing flirt with the "Whiteman's" education had evolved into a potential threat to the omnipotence of the previously unchallenged Fons.

Many of the Fons felt threatened by the new religion and seized the opportunity to pressure the new authorities to limit missionary activities in their territories. The traditional rulers made astute use of the uncertainty accompanying the switch from German to British rule to try to prevent a new wave of missionary activity from undermining their authority. Furthermore, the fact that the Catholic missionaries had been German gave rise to considerable suspicion on the part of the British administration. In post-World War I colonial logic, Catholicism was easily equated with allegiance to Germany. The British interpreted the fact that such a large contingent of Christians from Kom and Nso had enlisted in the German

army as an indication of the potentially subversive nature of Catholicism and were quick to associate mission activities with pro-German propaganda. Clearly, the early Christians were perceived to be hazardous not only to the authority of the new colonial government, but also to the authority of the local chiefs.

The implied threat to their own authority was not lost on the early British officials. The fears of the early British administrators went hand in hand with the interests of traditional rulers on whose support the British depended heavily. Though they may have overestimated the direct subversive potential of the young Christian Church, the British fears were not entirely unfounded. The German Missionaries and the Agents at Fernando Po were in constant communication with natives in this Division. In one of the letters written during the transitional periods, the fear of these Christians was much alive. Clearly, the new colonial administration found itself in a precarious dilemma.⁴⁴

The situation that the British inherited from the Germans included a Christianized population and the beginnings of a westernized elite. By keeping the missions out of Cameroon, the British would be certain to alienate that part of the African population, while at the same time signing the death warrant for the many schools started by the various missions. Allowing the missions to continue their activities uncontrolled, however, would most certainly alienate a significant other part of the population, including the so-called natural rulers on whose loyalty the British so much relied. Not only foreign missionaries posed a threat to English rule, so did independent Africans. Besides, the influence of missions had proved singularly difficult to assess in the past. The chiefs in the Bamenda area were of the opinion that the self-styled independence of the Christians undermined their traditional authority. Suffice it to say here that, in the first years of British rule, colonial mission policy was critical and cautious. From the very beginning, the colonial administration found itself entangled in a power struggle between Christian converts and tradition, a struggle that would continue throughout the ensuing decades, repeatedly posing an indirect but keenly felt threat to British hegemony.

⁴⁴BNA-Sd 1917/5, DO Podevin to Resident, 8.9.1917 in de Vries, Jacqueline Catholic Mission, colonial government and indigenous response in Kom (Cameroon) Leiden.

Regarding Christian missions, both Germany and Britain were guided by pragmatic motives and both co-operated with the missions to a certain degree in order to further their own aims: economic exploitation, the supply of labour and the “socialization” of the natives along colonial lines. The result was initially ad hoc and sometimes contradictory policy, informed by the colonial government’s dilemma: on the one hand, wanting to preserve and strengthen traditional authority and, on the other hand, striving to allow “modernizing” influences in the form of Christianity and education. The League of Nations guaranteed religious freedom in the colonies as well as liberty of conscience in the Mandated Territories. The following texts were adopted by the third session of the Permanent Mandates Commission held in Geneva from July 20, 1923, to August 10, 1923. “The commission drew attention to the fact that the mandate makes the exercise of religion subject to the condition that it should not be prejudicial to public order. In this connection, the mandate gives to the mandatory powers the right to exercise such control as may be necessary for the maintenance of public order. The maintenance of order is the first duty of the governor and order is a necessary condition for the full development of all freedoms, not exempting freedom from religion”.⁴⁵

The conflict which had become a menace to the maintenance of peace in the territory could not escape the attention of League of Nations. The thirteen plenary meeting held at Geneva on Wednesday, August 8, 1923, at 11am stated that “Any regulations, therefore, arising out of the necessity for the maintenance of order, if such order is genuinely endangered, be free from criticism, even should regulations should have the effect of restricting in some measure the free exercise of religion. On the other hand, any regulations on this subject which were to go beyond what is required for the maintenance of public order, any measure of vexatious nature or such as might have the effect of restricting activities of the missions of any particular denomination, would be contrary to the terms of the mandate.”⁴⁶

In the years between the expulsion of the Sacred Heart and Pallotine Missionaries and the arrival of the MILL HILL Missionaries, Christians

⁴⁵ Extracts from the minutes of the third session of the permanent mandates Commission held at Geneva from July 20th to August 10th 1923

⁴⁶ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Thirteen Meeting (Plenary and Public) held at Geneva on Wednesday, August 8, 1923, at 11am.

repatriated from Fernando Po made forceful attempts, often in total disregard of prevailing traditional norms, to re-establish Christian communities in their localities. Shanahan had made his reconnaissance tour and then retired to far away Ibo land in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Military chaplains ran these missions after the German fathers had been expelled. They must have found it difficult to cope with the two functions of chaplaincy and pastoral work among the many parish communities. At the end of the war in Cameroon, the commander of the French troops, General Aymerich, who was in favour of only French Missionaries remaining and working in Cameroon, addressed a letter to the Superior General of the Holy Ghost Fathers in Paris requesting missionaries for Cameroon. The answer was immediate and favourable. On October 9, 1916, the first contingent of seven Holy Ghost Fathers arrived in Douala to salvage the abandoned Missions. Although their number was insignificant for the vast work left behind by the German missionaries, their arrival was an assurance that many more missionaries would come. Two years later, the Catholic Church has its first bishop in the person of His Lordship Francois-Xavier Vogt, a native of Alsace in Europe which like Cameroon, had passed from German to French control.

French Sacred Heart Fathers, from their base in Dschang, visited Shisong occasionally. On May 5, 1915, five catechumens were baptized. It was not until 1920 that the French Fathers of the Society of the Sacred Heart of St. Quentin took over the Apostolic Prefecture at Adamawa with its seat at Foumban. Father Plissonneau became Prefect Apostolic. With the new generosity of Fon Njoya, the French Sacred Heart Missionaries acquired sizeable portions of land, which became the seat of the Church after the war. The Prefect Apostolic made clear his intention in a letter written on December 23, 1920.

“To do any useful work here we have to open absolutely two stations, one in Foumban and the other one in Kumbo. Only by settling in Foumban and working there, though we are outside the territory in which our German Fathers have worked which lies completely on the English side. In Kumbo, the teaching of doctrine is in the hands of the catechists. I have seen a little while back in Kumbo to visit this mission and to see about the reopening of the head station. The district is interesting to me especially through the number of Christians, which I found. I have written down the names of 200

in Kumbo, 30 in Fouban, together with 500 in the villages which I so far could reach.”⁴⁷

The French Sacred Heart Fathers and the non-German missionaries who had been in Cameroon tried to re-ignite the fervour of Catholicism. These combined attempts by locals and missionaries led to strife and dissension culminating in public trials of cases between Christians and those who stood for the traditional order. It soon became very clear to the British that, to maintain peace in the territory, the question of freedom of conscience and religious affiliation had to be resolved. The British, like the French, could not tolerate the presence of missionaries who were of a different nationality in their own backyard. It became certain that these missionaries and the new breed of Christians were at the root of the problems between the missions and the traditional rulers, who remained the indispensable pivot on which indirect rule was to revolve. Mr. F.H. Ruxton, the British Resident at Buea, wrote to the colonial office asking for British Catholic missionaries because groups of Christians kept asking for Reverend Fathers during his tours.⁴⁸

Sir Willoughby H. Dickinson, on behalf of the Executive of the World's Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, had suggested to the Secretaries for Colonies that German missionaries should be allowed to resume their work in British Territories. The *Morning Post* of Wednesday, July 27, 1921, announced that the colonial government had made some concession regarding the conditions under which foreign missionaries (German Missionaries) would be permitted to enter the territory. The Executive Committee of the British Council of the Alliance was informed that legislation had been passed prohibiting the entry of any former enemy alien for a period of three years unless the special permission of the government concerned was first obtained. The legislation applied in all colonies not possessing responsible government and in British Protectorates. As regards ex-enemy missionaries, experience during the war had shown that certain foreign societies and individuals were unable to prevent their national instincts from influencing their conduct to a degree incompatible with the due exercise of their proper functions and prejudicial to the security of the territories in which they were working. Consequently, in addition to the general restrictions, it was considered that missionaries of alien nationality

⁴⁷ Fondjo op. Cit.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

should not be permitted to work in the colonies and protectorates without adequate guarantee that they would confine themselves to their proper functions and abstain from any activities calculated to interfere with harmonious relations between the native races and the constituted authority.

The Secretary of State, however, was prepared to consider, in consultation with the colonial governments, applications of individual German missionaries of unimpeachable conduct for permission to enter the colonies, subject to their being under the control of British Allied or Associated subjects in the colony and their being vouched for by a responsible British ecclesiastical authority. It was realized, however, that the Mandated Territories and the territories adjoining them were the theatre of hostilities, that circumstances there were exceptional and that for some time to come a degree of supervision would be required there that was not considered necessary elsewhere.

The colonial office wrote to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fidei) and Rome entrusted Southern Cameroons to the MILL HILL Missionaries. In November 1921, Reverend William Campling, a Scottish Priest, was assigned to lead the first group of MILL HILL Missionaries to Cameroon. On Sunday, March 26, 1922, the first band of the MILL HILL Missionaries landed ashore at Victoria, including William Campling, Benedict Robinson, Michael Moran and William O'Kelly. Father Campling posted them to Bojongo and Sasse and to Kumbo in the Grass Fields. Father Campling, himself remained in Soppo and became its first Prefect.

The Coming of the Mill Hill Missionaries

The British Administration's choice of a British missionary organisation to replace the departing German missionaries in Southern Cameroons was complex and much more than a matter of political convenience and the fulfilment of cultural and colonial ambitions. In many ways, the Mandated Territory of Southern Cameroons was not a very attractive proposition to the British when the British government secured Cameroon as spoils of war. Lord Lugard, who was from the beginning apprehensive about taking over the Territory after the Condominium, publicly complained in 1916: "The little I have got to take over will give me as much work as a much larger

area.”⁴⁹ The initial problems the British Administrators faced with Christian novices in the territory only helped to confirm this negative insight. The reported lawlessness of the leaderless “native” converts of the Basel Mission in Kumba and Mamfe Divisions exacerbated the mounting conflicts between the French Sacred Heart Fathers who had reopened there and the powerful Fons of Nso and Kom through whom the Colonial Government administered some of the large Grassland Fondoms of the Bamenda Division. These traditional rulers passionately appealed for missionaries of British origin to replace the French Fathers. For their part, the British Government as a matter of policy imposed restrictions on missionaries of alien nationality working in their Colonies and Protectorates unless there were adequate guarantees that they would confine themselves to their proper functions and abstain from any activities calculated to interfere with the harmonious relations between the native races and the constituted authority.⁵⁰

Since British Southern Cameroons was one of those Mandated Territories of the League of Nations that had been a theatre of hostilities during First World War, its circumstances were exceptional, requiring a greater degree of supervision. These underlying considerations contributed in no small way to the hostile relations at Kumbo and Njinikom in Bamenda Division between the British Colonial Administrators and the traditional rulers on the one hand and the French Sacred Heart Fathers and their followers on the other.

Furthermore, during his tours of the country, the Resident, Major Fitz Herbert Ruxton, had come into contact with groups of Christians appealing for the return of Catholic priests. In addition to the “seditious Ethiopianism”⁵¹ among the chaotic, leaderless local Basel Mission adherents in the Forest Zone, the petitions from the Bamenda Fons and, above all, Father Shanahan’s recommendations led Ruxton to write to the Colonial Office about the urgent need for British Catholic missionaries. The Colonial Office, briefed on the exigency of the situation, contacted Rome.

⁴⁹Margery Perham, Lugard. *The Years of Authority*, London, Collins, St James Palace, 1960, p.545

⁵⁰ De Vries op. cit.

⁵¹ Millhilliana, 24th year, No. 2, 1972, pp 42-43, preface Paul Verdzekov to O’Neil Robert (1991) Mission to the British Cameroons. Mission Book Service.

Consequently, Cardinal Van Rossum of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, (Propaganda Fide) appealed to the Superior General of St. Joseph's Society for Foreign Missions, MILL HILL, and London, the lone British Catholic missionary organisation, to take over the work of the German Pallotine Fathers in British Southern Cameroons.

Administrative and Diplomatic Preparations

The response of the very Reverend Father Francis Henry, second Superior General of the MILL HILL Missionaries, to the Cardinal was unprecedented, defying all conventional logic. Though experiencing a severe shortage, having in 1921 alone lost seven young priests in Africa, he replied in the spirit of apostolic generosity: "I am indeed grateful to your Eminence. We look upon the wishes of the Sacred Congregation de Propaganda as so many commands requiring only our obedience."⁵² In addition, although England itself in the 1920s was in dire need of priests, Archbishop Manning ironically remarked: "It is because we need men and means at home that I am convinced We ought to send men and means abroad.... If faith is to be extended at home in must be by aiding to carry it abroad."⁵³ It was indeed by an act of faith in the first instance that the MILL HILL Missionaries ever agreed to look after the Cameroons missions. In April 1921, when the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelisation of the Peoples approached Father Francis Henry, asking him if he would be willing to send missionaries to the British Cameroons, the Society was faced with a serious work force shortage. Humanly speaking, Father Henry would have been justified in refusing to accept to staff and run the Cameroons Mission, for the society already had tremendous responsibilities in many parts of the world. The year before, in 1920, no fewer than seven young promising MILL HILL Fathers had died in East Africa, four of whom had been less than one year on the mission. As a result of the Great War, the number of seminarians at MILL HILL had sunk to an all-time low and the small number of yearly ordinations was scarcely

⁵² Response of the Very Reverend Father Francis to Cardinal van Rossum the Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda. Letter of 5/11/21 MA Cam., in Ndi (2005) op. cit. p 39

⁵³Reply from Rev. Father Francis Henry to Cardinal van Rossum MA Cam., 1921 in NDI, Anthony Mbunwe (1983), MILL HILL Missionaries and the State in Southern Cameroons, 1922-1962, London

sufficient to supply the needs of Uganda alone. Refusing to be scared by these apparently insurmountable difficulties and with a firm faith in the divine providence, Father Henry replied that the wishes of Rome where to be considered as commands and so he would send men to the Cameroons.

Father John William Campling, an experienced priest who had spent sixteen years serving the MILL HILL Mission in Uganda, was selected to lead the first group of MILL HILL missionaries to Southern Cameroons. On November 7, 1921, Propaganda Fide conferred the necessary faculties on him and at the same time appointed him “Superior” of the new Mission, but the exact limits of the territory under his jurisdiction were not defined. The document appointing Father Campling read: “In order that the Apostolic Vicariate in that part of Cameroon which is under British rule may be endowed with the good spirituality of a more enthusiastic heart, the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith commits to you through the present document, the office of Superior of the new mission, alongside the privileges attached to the faculties which you will thereby receive.”⁵⁴ He was further enjoined to furnish the Cardinal Prefect, Cardinal van Rossum, with an annual account of the status of the Mission. On completion of the ecclesiastical formalities between Rome and the Superior General of St. Joseph’s Society for Foreign Missions Father Francis Henry accordingly informed the Colonial Office of the instructions he had received from Rome. He asked the Colonial Office to grant Father Campling the necessary papers authorising him to take over all property and buildings formerly in possession of the German Roman Catholic Mission. The Secretary of State, Sir Winston Churchill, expressed his satisfaction that at last the work of the Catholic Mission previously established in Cameroons had been definitely entrusted by the Vatican to the care of St Joseph’s Society for Foreign Missions, MILL HILL, and a British missionary organisation. A year later, on December 22, 1922, after sounding the opinion, weighing the stakes and receiving clearance from the Governor General of Nigeria, he informed the MILL HILL Superior General that there was “no objection to placing the Very Rev. John Campling and his colleagues temporarily in possession ... of the property of all Roman Catholic Missions in the British sphere of

⁵⁴ “Protocolle” No. 3142/21 Rome of 7111/21 (Translated by Rev. Fr Cornelius Esua 1980) Njinikom. Parish Archives (PA). In NDI, Anthony Mbunwe (1983), MILL HILL Missionaries and the State in Southern Cameroons, 1922-1962, London

Cameroons.”⁵⁵ Subsequently, however, the property was to be vested in a Board of Trustees as provided for by Article 438 of the Treaty of Versailles.

Thus, with the pastoral, diplomatic and political procedures finally resolved, missionaries of St Joseph’s Society for Foreign Missions, MILL HILL, gradually slipped into the possessions of the former German Pallotine, German Sacred Heart and French Sacred Heart Missions in British Southern Cameroons. The task was to prove no easier for them than it had been for their German and French predecessors. Both Monsignor Campling and Monsignor Rogan had worked in Uganda where they had put in years of primary evangelisation, which left lasting impressions not only in the pastoral field but also in their own persons. The missionary experiences gained in East Africa were broadly useful in Southern Cameroons, but quite often got the Reverend Fathers into serious trouble with the colonial administrators and the traditional rulers because of the different ruling systems. The MILL HILL Fathers were faced with a territory varying greatly in geographic and human factors. The few hundred miles from the coast to the Bamenda Highlands displayed every physical, vegetation and climatic type except desert. The cultural homogeneity enjoyed by the MILL HILL Missionaries in Uganda was lacking in Cameroon. Languages, customs and leadership patterns were different as one moved from the coastal regions to the Grass Fields. The greatest diversity was not in the physical terrain. Numerous tribal and ethnic systems with languages numbering over a hundred were a troubling and unattractive spectacle with which the missions had to grapple. These ranged from the highly centralised traditional kingdoms of the Bamenda Grasslands, with its semi-divine, monarchical rulers claiming Tikar origin, to the more decentralised and westernised communities on the coast.

The seeds of mutual exclusivity between the MILL HILL missionaries and their Christian followers, on the one hand and the traditional rulers backed by the British colonial administration, on the other hand, were inherent in their very fabrics. Although invited through the initiative of the British colonial administration, the MILL HILL missionaries as such were only nominally British.⁵⁶ Their complex and diverse origins, background and

⁵⁵CIB No. 51 March 1966, pp. 7-8. In NDI, Anthony Mbunwe (1983), *MILL HILL Missionaries and the State in Southern Cameroons, 1922-1962*, London

⁵⁶Actually, the founder, Cardinal Vaughan, envisaged his society to be an International Missionary Congregation comprising: Austrians, English, German, Irish, Italian, Tyrolese,

spiritual formation rendered them fundamentally international in character. Their Catholic religious practices were generally repellent to the traditional rulers, who for the most part comprised polygamous leaders wielding enormous power over the life and death of their subjects. Unvaryingly, they were disinclined to Catholic doctrine, which prescribed monogamy and declared the equality of all before God. Thus, the potential for explosive relations between the missionaries and the administrative officers elicited by the inharmoniousness between them and the Native Authority was real and did not take long to surface.⁵⁷

The disagreements that ultimately built up between the missionaries and the conservatives in the traditional set-up largely resulted not only from these factors but also from the nauseating attitude, which missionaries harboured towards African traditional religions and cultures. Between the priests and the Colonial Administration a great deal of spite and ill-feeling sparked off from the fact that missionaries disregarded the role of traditional rulers on which indirect rule depended, while the colonial authorities depended on Indirect Rule whose cornerstones were the chiefs and Fons. This seemingly simple lesson was to take the MILL HILL Missionaries almost two decades to understand and to amend fully to the certainties of the Cameroons traditional systems.

Like the natives' appeals of late 1800s for annexation, appeals from natives remained equally incessant prior to coming of the MILL HILL Missionaries to the Southern Cameroons. For example, Stephen the Tailor, one of the early Catholic zealots who, like Sango Matthias Efiem, had been educated at Sasse, could not contain his wish to see the missionaries back. He had the audacity to write to Lord Lugard, Governor General of Nigeria, complaining about the lack of priests in British Southern Cameroons. Eventually, he received a reply informing him that four priests from an English Mission called "Mill Hill" would arrive shortly to continue the work of the German Missions. Tailor Stephen quickly circulated this message around the coastal villages of Buea, Victoria, Bonjongo and Tiko. It was thus that when Father William Campling and his three companions, the Reverend Fathers Benedict Robinson, Michael Moran and William O'Kelly landed

Dutch, Scottish and American-all of whom served in Cameroon'. C.P. No. 235 Nov. 1989, p. 22.

⁵⁷Ndi op. cit.

ashore at Victoria on Sunday March 26, 1922, they found a welcome party already awaiting their arrival. Major Ruxton, who was away on tour also anticipating the advent of the missionaries, delegated two Government officials to receive them on his behalf.

Once back from tour, He invited Father Campling to Buea and, as a gesture of good will, immediately offered the priest a vacant house in which to establish his mission headquarters. But the local MILL HILL Superior graciously declined the offer because he desired an area capable of accommodating the future expansion of the Mission. The Resident then left at his usage the derelict German Army Barracks at Soppo near Buea, which suited the priest perfectly. Work was soon initiated there and a “Bush Church” with mats and sticks was erected. It was appropriately re-christened “Regina Pacis” (Queen of Peace) to offset its original bellicose connotation.⁵⁸ Soppo subsequently became the Headquarters of the Catholic Mission in Southern Cameroons until 1970 when Bamenda was created as a separate Diocese.

Major Ruxton, though not a Catholic, told Campling that he would never have been able to convince him or anybody of the great cry there was for Catholic priests throughout British Southern Cameroons through correspondence alone. He predicted that the MILL HILL Missionary Society would require dozens of priests to cope with the wonderful openings before them. He then briefed Campling on the state of affairs in the country and especially about the existence of the French Sacred Heart Fathers, who were operating the mission “in the far north at Kumbo.” He thought that the MILL HILL Superior would take over immediately as there were mounting clashes between the French Missionaries and the Chiefs on one hand and the administrative officers on the other. The Resident also had a pleasant surprise of 200 pounds for Campling, being money paid for mission cows at Bonjongo, sequestered by British soldiers during the war.

These initial warm and cordial relations between the Chief Colonial Officer administering the Territory and the local MILL HILL Superior were of great significance. There is a common consensus among missiologists that relations between Missions and Colonial Administrations were generally

⁵⁸Campling to Fr General 21/3/23 in MA Cam., 1923., Box 2. Interestingly they had a canton in the front garden.

better and support more generous, where national missions operated in colonies of the powers concerned. However, while this was not exactly the case in British Southern Cameroons, because it was not an Anglican Mission but a Catholic one in a British Mandated Territory, the distinction was that Major Ruxton had personally invited the MILL HILL Missionaries and that he himself was an exceptionally genial and generous character. Consequently, the missionaries were soon put at ease and, at the prompting of the Resident, received considerable cooperation and assistance from the administrative officers in the field.

HERBERT ALFRED VAUGHAN

Herbert Alfred Vaughan founded the MILL HILL Missionaries. He was the first child of John and Louisa Elisabeth Vaughan, born on Sunday April 5, 1832, at Beaufort Buildings in Gloucester. Herbert was born to a life of privilege at Courtfield. As the scion of the Vaughan estate with good and loving parents, he had many material advantages. John Vaughan thought his son Herbert would become his successor and squire of Courtfield. Perhaps the boy would pursue the army career that was denied to his father when he left Stonyhurst. There is little doubt that John Vaughan took the nurturing of his first son very seriously. As a little boy, he had been enthralled by her mother's devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. He often watched her from the gravel path in the garden.

A battle with poor health was to trouble Herbert Vaughan throughout his life. There has been speculation that the state of his health influenced his decision to become a priest. There is even a tradition in the Vaughan family that Herbert's thoughts were first turned towards the priesthood as the result of a medical examination for the army revealing weakness of the heart which would made him unfit for the field.

Herbert Vaughan and Missionary Beginnings

Herbert Vaughan was never completely free from the haunting wish to get away from civilization altogether and in some far land devote himself, body and soul, to the work of converting the heathen. Vaughan's fervour for the foreign missions remained throughout his life. He was respected internationally as a promoter of the missionary work of the Church. In his final days, he explained his understanding of the Church's and the standards

expected of the missionary, in a collection of conferences on the apostolic life entitled 'The Young Priest'. According to Vaughan there were two categories of missionaries: those working for the conversion of England, especially priests ordained "ad titulum missions and those who were sent into the midst of the heathen populations of the world. With the latter, he had a close relationship through the society he was to found at MILL HILL. Whether working for the conversion of England or overseas for non-Christian populations of the world, they were missionaries. A missionary, he wrote, "especially an ordained priest like himself, is called to a very high standard, an "apostolic standard".⁵⁹

Herbert Vaughan tried to enlist the help of others in his commitment to the missionaries; not everyone shared his, at times, impulsive enthusiasms. He was the spiritual director of the Sisters of St. Mary's Abbey, MILL HILL, in the late 1860s and remained associated with the community for many years afterwards. The St. Mary's nuns remember that, in season and out of season, he urged the beauty of foreign missionary work. As late as 1902, a year before his death, he told the Abbess that she must provide six sisters for the Uganda Mission. One of the greatest achievements of Herbert Vaughan's life was the founding of a missionary college in the North-West London suburb of MILL HILL. For Edward Norman, Vaughan's St. Joseph Society for which the Foreign Missions "give an example of Catholic activism to a Church which despite the Roman direction imparted by Wiseman and Manning was still very inward looking. Vaughan's foundation, the first of its kind in the Catholic Church in England, was to help inspire generations of Catholic young men with noble vocations to a wider service."⁶⁰

From the sixteenth century and the outset of Reformation, Rome considered England and Wales to be mission countries. After the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity in April 1559, Roman Catholics had the choice of conforming or being exiled to the Continent. The exile movement of Catholics who refused to conform continued without intermission until the

⁵⁹ Vaughan, the Young Priest, pp.2ff,96,112 in O'NEIL, Robert (1997), Cardinal Herbert Vaughan Archbishop of West Minister, Bishop of Salford, Founder of MILL HILL Missionaries, Crossroad Herder pp.105

⁶⁰ Charles Bolton, Salford Diocese and its Catholic Past Manchester, 1951,p.131 in O'NEIL, Robert (1997), Cardinal Herbert Vaughan Archbishop of West Minister, Bishop of Salford, Founder of MILL HILL Missionaries, Crossroad Herder

French Revolution two centuries later. From 1581, the penalty was death for celebrating Mass, administering the sacraments and sheltering priests. Under Penal Law, Roman Catholic priests had to lead an underground or at least discrete existence. Most of the Catholic priests were trained on the Continent. William Allen established a college at Douai in 1568. The first missionary left the Douai seminary for England in 1574. The English College at Rome became a missionary seminary followed by Valladolid, Seville and Madrid in Spain and Lisbon in Portugal. Father Persons founded the seminary at Valladolid and those at Eu and Saint-Omer. England, Wales and Scotland were administered by missionary Vicars Apostolic and divided into districts. Until 1840, there were four for England. Certainly, this feeling and legislation against the Church caused Catholics to have some resentment towards constituted official authority in Britain. Whether this anti-Catholic feeling influenced the conduct of the British in the territory remains a matter of debate. Some British officials in the territory were sympathetic towards the missions whereas others were not.

In their dealings with colonial government, the MILL HILL missionaries seem to have imbibed some of these qualities from their father and Founder. The root cause of the obtrusive behaviour of MILL HILL missionaries in Cameroon is a subject that has not been fully examined. The manner in which he expressed his views in *The Tablet* may hold the key to unlocking some of the reasons. Vaughan held that it was his duty as a Catholic editor to oppose wrong-headed persons in the most effective manner possible. Often Herbert Vaughan was criticized not for the views he held, but rather for using *The Tablet* to defend those views in an odious and unchristian manner.

The Foreign Missions

Vaughan endeavoured to keep reminding the Church of England of the needs of the unevangelized world outside of Great Britain. On the Feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury, December 29, 1898, he wrote to his priests concerning a special collection that was to be made on the feast of the Epiphany 1899 for the “evangelisation of Africa.” His letter was mentioned in the *Tablet* of January 7. The money was to be used by Propaganda Fide “to put down the curse of African slavery and to establish in its place the voluntary and sweet service of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” Vaughan stressed a special obligation: “To boast that the British Empire has grown to be by far

the greatest in extent that the world has ever seen is folly. All boasting is vanity and weakness ... whatever the character of the conqueror or the intentions of their government, a great and wise and loving redeemer overrules secondary causes and utilizes them for ends of mercy.”⁶¹

What had brought him to make such an urgent appeal was the reconquest by Britain of the Sudan and the country between Khartoum and Uganda. This new dispensation according to him “ought to inspire every faithful Catholic among us with a renewed fire of enthusiasm for the salvation of souls.” Vaughan had a vision of the Catholic Churches in the United States, Canada and “the old Irish and British Churches” in a new enterprise “to vie with each other in organizing missionary bands for Africa and the Far East , to become more generous in their gifts for the propaganda of the faith abroad; in a word, to create within their own centres armies of apostolic men and women ready to leave home and kindred and die in the propaganda of the faith, ready to obey the voice of the Vicar of Christ, as armies obey the command of their General.”⁶²

Herbert Vaughan returned to a similar melody in his Christmas message on December 17, 1899. More than any other, the thought of the English Catholic Church’s duty towards Africa had been in his mind for the previous six months. “Some are satisfied by the acquisition of power, some by the development of British common interests, some are carried away by the idea of Imperialism and so forth ... What in the Divine dispensation is the mission of our Great British Empire – say towards Africa and the African races? She is advancing, conquering, settling, laying down her roads by land and water-iron, steam and electrical. She proposes to civilize, does she propose to Christianize? She everywhere establishes liberty and order will she allow Christianity to use the liberty and order she establishes in order that the

⁶¹ Cardinal Herbert Vaughan in Robert O’Neil (1997) Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, Archbishop of Westminster Bishop of Salford Founder of the MILL HILL Missionaries, Crossroads Herder pp.432

⁶² The Pope’s Collection for the Evangelization of Africa and Our New Obligation by Herbert Cardinal Vaughan, Feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury, 1898 in Cardinal Herbert Vaughan in Robert O’Neil (1997) Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, Archbishop of Westminster Bishop of Salford Founder of the MILL HILL Missionaries, Crossroads Herder pp.432 p.451

Gospel may be preached and constant efforts put forth to make disciples of all men?”⁶³

Herbert Vaughan's interest in the evangelisation of Africa goes back to the early days of St. Joseph's Missionary College at MILL HILL. He had hopes that his first group of missionaries at Baltimore would someday prepare African-Americans to become missionaries and return to Africa. According to Arthur McCormack, his interest in Africa as a mission-field for his new missionary society began when he first met the explorer Henry Morton Stanley, who had returned from a journey to Central Africa in 1876. Vaughan was a vice-president and one of the original promoters of the Manchester Geographical Society when he was at Alford and so had opportunity to meet people like Stanley.

Vaughan not only had an interest in Africa, but he was also very knowledgeable about the continent. He showed this in an article he wrote for the Dublin Review in January 1879 titled: "The Evangelisation of Africa." It was the first issue of the review under his ownership and with Bishop Hedley as editor. In twenty-six pages, he outlined a history of Africa and then suggested that commerce and science might aid the work of evangelisation. His essay reflects the literature of the time on Africa: a mid-Victorian view of the world that "was suffused with a vivid sense of superiority and self-righteousness, if with every good intention," for the evangelisation of Africa. However, Vaughan's aim was for a Church ruled not by Europeans but by African Christians.⁶⁴ Vaughan continued: "Here is a vast, unknown country, with an enormous population of intelligent human beings, having an area more than 240 times the size of England and Wales, dependent for salvation upon the same number of bishops as form the Province of Westminster and upon less than half our number of priests ... Worse than this, these priests are chiefly upon the mere fringe of the continent; they are scattered along immense coasts, at intervals of space in which there are, even on the coast,

⁶³ Vaughan, the Young Priest, pp.2ff,96,112 in O'NEIL, Robert (1997), Cardinal Herbert Vaughan Archbishop of West Minister, Bishop of Salford, Founder of MILL HILL Missionaries, Crossroad Herder

⁶⁴Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, African and the Victorians New York, St. Martin's Press, 1961, pp. 2-3 in Robert O'Neil (1997) Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, Archbishop of West Minister Bishop of Salford Founder of the MILL HILL Missionaries, Crossroads Herder.

millions of souls unknown and uncared for, while the vast interior is teeming with many more millions, who will remain plunged in utter darkness until Catholic charity shall permanently settle down amongst them...Where, then, is the Catholic who refuses light and help to these millions of his brethren? How long shall we remain deaf, stone-deaf, to their claim upon our souls? The God who made us dependent upon those who preached the Gospel of Salvation to our souls had made them dependent upon us.”⁶⁵

Vaughan urged that Europe promote the missionary enterprise to Africa by doing as “Palestine did send our Apostles and missionaries until they have founded everywhere native priesthoods. “However, he was convinced that the only hopeful, promising and effective way to proceed in Africa was the conversion of Africa by the Africans. He concluded the article with a quote from the address he had given in New York in 1872 after accompanying his first mission band to Baltimore. Vaughan hoped to see members of St. Joseph’s Missionary Society at work in Africa, “aided, multiplied and extending their labours through the generous and loving co-operation of coloured people from this country. Catechists, sisters and missionaries will rise among them.”⁶⁶

In 1894, Herbert Vaughan realized his dream of participating in the evangelisation of Africa. It was not done with Africa-Americans recruited by the independent Josephites in the United States, but by his missionaries from MILL HILL. In 1894, Vaughan’s missionaries were invited to go to East Africa. After the explorations of Livingstone in the 1870s, three missionary societies offered to work in the region. The Lyons Missionaries settled at the mouth of the Nile. Four days after the election of Pope Leo XIII, Cardinal Lavigerie’s White Fathers were assigned to regions of central Africa and finally Daniel Comboni, the vicar apostolic of Central Africa in Khartoum, promised to establish a mission in the area of the great lakes.

⁶⁵Vaughan Herbert in Robert O’Neil (1997) Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, Archbishop of West Minister Bishop of Salford Founder of the MILL HILL Missionaries, Crossroads Herder.

⁶⁶Vaughan, Evangelization, Dublin Review, p.208 in Robert O’Neil (1997) Cardinal Herbert Vaughan, Archbishop of West Minister Bishop of Salford Founder of the MILL HILL Missionaries, Crossroads Herder.

Expansion of His Missionaries Idea

Herbert Vaughan's idea of a missionary life had not dimmed and his travels in Europe and studies at Rome had broadened his interests. The Roman Church in England fought to exist under Penal Law and became the object of the missionary activity of foreign trained missionaries. The Roman Catholic Church was referred to sarcastically as the "Italian mission to England". The known world was witnessing a spectacular expansion of missionary evangelisation. Men and women were inspired by the idea of a free, independent and non-political planting of the faith.

The Pallotine and Sacred Heart Missionaries had made final attempts to preserve their legacy in Cameroon in the most unexpected circumstances, unparalleled to any in history, by catechising, baptising and commanding indigenes to go home and keep the faith alive in conditions far removed from the supervision of any church authority. Traditional rulers as well as British authorities saw the trouble and friction between indigenous Christians as mainly a product of unsupervised indigenous Christian activity. When missionaries of French and Luxemburgish nationalities joined the Christians, it became a battle between indigenous Christians and missionaries on the one hand and traditional rulers and British colonial officers on the other hand. For example, in a petition to the British officer in charge of the Bamenda Division, the Fon of Kom complained bitterly against the intransigence and provocative actions of the newly found Christian community in Njinikom. In a letter addressed to the Divisional Officer of Bamenda Division, Fon Ngam complained that the "present missionaries are entirely controlled for the most part by ex-German soldiers whose sole aim is to disorganise our native system of government and to gain administrative powers themselves; to attain this objective they offer insults to my religion, my police and my messengers and are continually seducing the wives of my people and even my own women ... that the Roman Catholic Mission now controlled by aliens who do not understand native customs in our country be removed and replaced by English Missionaries who can make themselves understood to us."⁶⁷ The British officers viewed the actions of Monsignor Plissonneau in Kumbo and Kom with total disgust.

⁶⁷BNA-Sd 1921/1, Petition from Fon Ngam to the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division.

The irritation of the colonial government was compounded by the fact that, in the first years after the war, the European leaders of the missions in the Bamenda Grass Fields were not British. The Resident was led to comment that Monsignor Plissonneau's Belgian Congo training did not help him in a country under British administration. "None of the Fathers speaks English and one was actually captured by our troops in 1915 and interned though a subject of Luxembourg".⁶⁸ The nationality of the missionaries remained an impediment to effective British control of the territory. The Divisional officer of Bamenda Division took exception to the mention of Father Schmidt in connection with a court case heard by the Fungom Native Court. "Neither of the Fathers at Njinikom were English and it was extremely difficult to make them understand our methods".⁶⁹

In general, the loyalty of the missionaries to the colonial system was one of the problems that plagued the entire period of British control of Southern Cameroons. Irish and Dutch missionaries had little affection for the British colonial officers. Although MILL HILL missionaries had their base in the colonising country, many of their members were not British. Irish and British missionaries were frequently requested to leave Cameroon and never to return. Memos and confidential reports named a good number of them, finally advising Bishop Rogan to consider them for service elsewhere. The MILL HILL missionaries were unable to recruit a good number of English Catholics into their fold. Many of the English Catholics were poor Irish immigrants and the founder's appeal to them met with limited success. He was, therefore, prepared to admit any candidates irrespective of nationality. It is for this reason that many of the missionaries in Cameroon were of Dutch or some other non-British origin, which provided enormous potential for nasty clashes with British administrators, who regarded them as foreigners in their backyard. Rogan had no choice but to comply with the wishes of the administrators. But, his immediate collaborators accused him of favouritism towards the Dutch missionaries and of harbouring anti-Irish feelings, even though he himself was a fervent Irishman. This is not to say that all Dutch missionaries lived up to expectation.

⁶⁸ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1921, p.9. The reference is to Father Bintner.

⁶⁹ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Confidential reports on the MILL HILL Missionaries in Cameroon.

African Christianity in Retrospect

The period of missionary endeavours in Africa on a large scale was also the age of great scientific inventions. The discoveries in genetics and radiochemistry boosted the optimism and faith in progress that characterised this period. Max Planck laid the foundation for modern physics in 1900 with research in quantum physics, Niels Bohr became the prime mover in solving the mystery of the structure of the atom, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Charles Darwin helped shape the thought patterns of the time. However, many missionaries came to Africa without the benefit of knowledge of African anthropology, religion or philosophy and with at best very vague and misconstrued ideas of African customs and traditions.⁷⁰ They, thus, plunged themselves into a very strange and unfamiliar terrain. The missionaries who began this modern phase of Christian expansion in Africa were devout, sincere and dedicated men, but they were not necessarily theologians. They were more concerned with practical evangelisation, education and healthcare than with any academic or theological issues that arose from the presence of Christianity in Africa.⁷¹

Spurred on by the missionary theology of the time and zeal for the salvation of souls, the early missionaries went into action even at the risk of their own lives. Tropical disease infested equatorial rain forest unfamiliar and dangerous terrain, which claimed the lives of many literally cropping them in the vigour of their youth, were not enough to deter, scare, or even enfeeble their spirits.⁷² Writing about the Nigerian Mission, Forestal goes on to say: “It was a pattern that was to repeat itself with sad regularity during the years that followed. New missionaries continued to arrive from Europe only to be carried off by malaria, dysentery, sleeping sickness, yellow fever or some other ailment within months of their arrival. It was to be the pattern of the early years of the Nigerian mission, years of immense sacrifice and bitter failure. Nigeria lived up to its reputation as ‘the Whiteman’s grave,’ and the

⁷⁰Awoh Peter Acho, (2010) *The dynamics and Contradictions of Evangelization in Africa, The Kom Christian Experience.*

⁷¹ Mbiti, John (1969), *African religions and philosophy*, East African Educational Publishers.

⁷²Awoh op cit.

mortality rate among the missionaries was very high”.⁷³ In the case of the German catholic mission in Cameroon the mortality rate of the missionaries was equally very high. During the twenty-four years of evangelisation in Cameroon, the Pallotine missionaries had lost nine priests, twenty-two brothers and five sisters ⁷⁴bringing the total number to thirty six missionaries declared dead in Cameron.

Colonial versus Missionary Motives

As was the case in Latin American and South East Asian countries, missionaries of various European colonial powers over the centuries naturally have followed their secular compatriots into the colonies. It was also natural that Christianity and colonization were introduced into the country at the same time. The fact that Christianity in Cameroon came in the wake of colonization has made it almost impossible for many people to dissociate Christianity from the trappings of western culture.

Missionaries as well colonial officers saw colonization as a divine mandate to evangelize and civilise the races that were staggering in the universal forward march to spiritual and material progress. Lord Lugard’s book “The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa” was published in 1922. It discusses indirect rule in colonial Africa. In this work, Lugard outlined the reasons and methods that he recommended for the colonization of Africa by Britain. Some of his justifications included spreading Christianity and ending barbarism. He also saw state-sponsored colonization as a way to protect missionaries, local chiefs and local people from each other as well as from foreign powers.

A correspondent from Senior District Officer of Bamenda Division to the Resident of the Cameroons Province in 1938 highlighted the idea of divine mandate disguised in the myth of a superior culture. Among other issues, he quoted “Father Bruens’ belief that the superior culture must dominate the lower culture of the African and that the proper study of the modern anthropologist was their merging or the superimposition of the superior on the lower. The old fashion student should interest himself in the origins of divine kingship or the collection of stone implements. The pagan

⁷³ Desmond Forestal, *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*. Veritas 1990 p.44

⁷⁴ Centenary Album of the Church in Cameroon

objection that the erection of a R.C.M. church would involve the loss of their women was not valid. If the women chose to adopt the higher culture, so much the worse for the lower.”⁷⁵ Both colonial authorities and missionaries were agreed that “the introduction of Christianity into a primitive community where the pagan religion is the basis of the tribal constitution must cause a certain amount of bitterness but this need only be of a very temporary nature.”⁷⁶

Africans perceived Christianity as part of the package offered by the colonial powers. There were instances where the colonial authorities and missionaries presented themselves as birds of the same feather. In theory, colonial accounts leave no doubt that the colonial powers had no other motive than economic. German colonial accounts in Cameroon put it bluntly: “If new resources are not created and if one does not work along the lines of the old school, as seen above, the exclusive exploitation of all these products, taking into account only the good instantaneous finances of the colony, will continue to work and not be able to say anything other than wastage created and sustained by the state which will not in the future prevent the consequences except with extraordinary means. A farsighted colonial economy should pay its attention for now on the unexploited resources; these are the land and soil; the natives living on these must be exhorted to discover the treasures, which are found beneath the soil. The future of Africa is in the cultivation of plantations by the natives under state control. The natives had to consecrate or be constrained to engage in the plantation economy. If one does it through a friendly proposal no black will do it. By imposing it on them, no one of good conscience will agree.”⁷⁷

Although the main motives of colonial enterprise were economic, certain derivatives of this enterprise bordered on humanitarianism. Whether these were externalities or spill-over, western colonial authorities found certain prevailing practices abhorrent and detestable and they naturally thought it incumbent on them to put an end to them. Human sacrifice, reckless and

⁷⁵BNA-Sd 1921/1, Correspondent from the District officer Bamenda Division to the Resident of Cameroons Province Buea, No. N.A. 385/119.

⁷⁶ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Correspondent from the District officer Bamenda Division to the Resident of Cameroons Province Buea, No. N.A. 385/119.p.28

⁷⁷ Nkwi, Paul Nchoji (1989) German presence in the western Grassfields 1891-1913 A German Colonial Account, Leiden.

ruthless tribal war fare and ordeals were gradually brought to a halt by western powers. Powerful monarchs, almost an enigma in some places, were gradually demobilised and dispossessed by keeping a tight rein on them. One of these monarchs whose authority was eroded beyond expectation and who almost became a prisoner in his own Fandom, was the Fon of Kom. In 1924, Divisional Officer Hunt commented on the intransigence of the Fon, saying that “His trouble is of long standing and likely to be perennial, until the new social order regarding the foretime sacrosanct wives of a chief is accepted, as it will have to be accepted. (...) The Chief is cutting himself off from some 2000 of his people because twenty-five of his numerous wives have left him.”⁷⁸

Economic motives remained foreign to the missionaries, whose sole preoccupation was the worth and salvation of human souls. This was not always the case. In 1919, the Pope went on to lament about what he saw as the scandalous and disheartening behaviour of some missionaries who had begun to imitate the greed of the colonialists. “We have been deeply saddened by some recent accounts of missionary life, accounts that displayed more zeal for the profit of some particular nation than for the growth of the kingdom of God. We have been astonished at the indifference of their authors to the amount of hostility these works stir up in the minds of unbelievers. This is not the way of the Catholic missionary, not if he is worthy of the name. No, the true missionary is always aware that he is not working as an agent of his country, but as an ambassador of Christ.”⁷⁹

Christianity and African Traditional Religion

They missionaries, true to the spirit and pattern of thought of the time, saw African traditional religion as completely under the influence of demonic forces and, therefore, opposed to the divine. Although Shanahan did not espouse the views of those who believed in violently overthrowing sacred shrines in Africa, the idea of the devil as the main driving force behind some of the abhorrent and horrendous traditional practices was clear. For example,

⁷⁸ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, pp.6-7.

⁷⁹Benedict XV. (1919) *Maximum Illud*: Apostolic Letter on the Propagation of the Faith Throughout the world. 30 November 1919. Translated by Thomas J. M. Burke, SJ Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Office, no. 20

writing about his experiences in Nigeria, he refers to a village that he was physically unable to enter. “Nothing that I could do would get a stir out of my leg. I turned to come back and found that as easy as ever. I went around the outskirts until I met another path going in. On trying to follow this, I was stopped dead a second time. Therefore, I came away and left the place to Satan. He has ruled there ever since.”⁸⁰ Generally, missionaries set themselves about with the task of rooting out practices that correctly or erroneously were perceived to be at odds with Christianity; witchcraft, ancestral cult, village deities, polygamy and necromancy remained the object of their missionary efforts and labours.

The French missionaries loved the people they preached to, gladly sacrificing for their sake, but they could not completely rid themselves of patronising attitudes. They spoke of them as the “chers noirs”, the dear blacks and the lovable children who had to be guided with a firm hand for their own good. The French, like the British, saw themselves as a great colonial power whose divine given mandate was to rule the African and teach him the ways and wisdom of the Whiteman. It never occurred to them that there was anything of value in African culture and religion.⁸¹ What the missionaries set out to uproot and dismantle was for the Africans, the adherents to be, their natural heritage, the tenets of their religion. These same traditions that became the source of animosity and deep seated suspicion between the African non-Christians, on one hand and the missionaries, on the other, contained time-honoured answers and solutions to many if not all of African life problems. For this reason, many viewed Christianity with deep-seated suspicion, distrusting from the very beginning its message and practices. Already early converts to Christianity had an air of superiority over their relatives and tended to pride themselves on disregarding the local authorities when possible. It is evident from reviews and appeals against decisions of the Native Court that the local native, already a self-willed and stubborn type, became even more so after embracing the Roman Catholic faith. He appeared to be under the impression that he could totally ignore all

⁸⁰John Jordan, Bishop Shanahan of Southern Nigeria p.154 in Desmond Forristal (1990), *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan* p.93 Veritas.

⁸¹ Forristal op. Cit.

native law, particularly laws relating to inheritance and ownership of land⁸², and many other native laws that had nothing to do with religion as such. However, the converts under the guidance of the missionaries often dumped the whole lot.

Some Missionaries viewed African Traditional Religion with deep-seated revulsion. Whether it was out of personal weakness of character, ignorance or over zealotness, we cannot say. In 1929, Father Scully allegedly caused a scandal by kicking a native sacrifice. His behaviour provoked critical commentaries from the entire colonial hierarchy, up to the level of the Lieutenant Governor and was considered grave enough to warrant his imprisonment.⁸³ By 1931, mission-state relations had deteriorated to the point that Bishop Rogan was presented with an ultimatum: either the Church would profess her support to the British efforts to strengthen the recognized Native Authorities, or the Catholic mission would be forced to leave the country. Having been left little choice in the matter, Bishop Rogan complied with the government's request, issuing the following statement: "In view of the fact that the reprehensible actions of several MILL HILL Fathers have led (the government) to believe that we refuse to recognize the authority (...) of the native Chiefs (I offer) my guarantee that any Father who recklessly interferes in any way with the legitimate business of native Courts and with the lawful jurisdiction of Native Chiefs, will be sent out of the country by me immediately".⁸⁴ "In fact, the MILL HILL mission was opposed to the British system of Indirect Rule, regardless of the nationality of the priests concerned, because Indirect Rule was based largely on the authority of chiefs, who invariably had large, polygamous households".⁸⁵

⁸² BNA-Cb 1934/1, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1935, p.11. In De Vries Jacqueline (1998) Catholic Mission, Colonial government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon) African studies centre.

⁸³ Ndi 1986: op cit 121

⁸⁴ BNA-Sad 1928/2, Mgr. Rogan to Resident, 10.10.1931 in De Vries Jacqueline (1998) Catholic Mission, Colonial government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon) African studies centre

⁸⁵De Vries Jacqueline, (1998) Catholic Missions: Colonial Government and indigenous response in Kom (Cameroon) African Studies Centre

Philosophical and Cultural Consequences of Conversion to Christianity

Preaching Christianity in its totality and expecting Africans to adhere to it without reserve was asking the African adherents to exchange one set of customs, beliefs and practices for another. These sets of practices, customs and beliefs touched on the fundamental concepts of African identity, religion and philosophy of life. Whether Christian missionary work in Africa was to fail or succeed depended very much on how the missionaries presented Christianity and how it was perceived and received by the African converts and their relatives. The real test of Christianity, as in every age, naturally presented itself during the very unset of Christianity. The perennial question remains very relevant to our time – whether one could be a true Christian and a true African at the same time. From the start, Missionary Christianity was not prepared to face a serious encounter with either the traditional religions and philosophy of Africa or the modern changes taking place there.⁸⁶

Literal and historical accounts present us with evidence of many adherents to Christianity who had to come to terms with what it meant to embrace Christianity. Notables who became Christians were rewarded for their allegiance to Christianity by their tribesmen with cultural isolation, stripped of their titles, persecuted, or simply ostracised. Christianity no doubt, was a threat to the foundations of ethnic groups, alongside their creed and customs, which had stood the test of time, were the very things African converting to Christianity had to abandon. In the Bamenda highlands, one of these notables who paid the full price was Pa Martin Atang, founder of the Catholic Mission and first catechist of Mankon. “Happy with their new found Religion, they were anxious to return home and introduce it to their people...but the village chief and his notables did not welcome their religion. Instead, they became very hostile to Martin, ostracised him and did not want to see him in the village. He was further stripped off his title, Tabara- a title he had held before leaving Bamenda hill top station in search of work with the Whiteman. This title ranks him first among the nobles of the clan, the kingmakers. He was given the nickname ‘Tizibong’ which means ‘one who

⁸⁶ Mbiti, John (1969) African religions and philosophy, East African Educational Publishers p.232

does not know the good.”⁸⁷ The scenario in Bafmeng was of a different magnitude, involving Christians and not simply an individual. The Christians began to criticise the pagans for their polygamy and their sacrifices. The pagans became angry. In some cases, they tore away the medals from the women’s necks, ground them and put them into water for the women to drink. They beat the catechumens who went to doctrine. The chief finally drew a line in old town between the “pagan town” and the “mission.” No juju would humbug the Christians as long as they stayed on their own side of the line.⁸⁸ In Nso, the Fon, obviously, was not prepared to brook such an open and ominous challenge to this retrieved authority: arrests, scourgings, lockings-up became the daily lot of the Christians. If the interregnum between the German expulsion and the setting up of the Franco-English co-dominion had lasted longer, blood would have been shed and some would have died for Christ among the Nso clansmen.⁸⁹

Wherever the African is, there is his religion. He carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop and he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony. If he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at the school or the university. If he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. To be human is to belong to the whole society, which involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivities of that community. A person cannot detach himself from the religion of his group, for to do so is to be severed from his roots, his foundations, his context of security, his kinship and the entire group of those who make him aware of his existence. Thus, to be without religion amounts to self-excommunication from the entire life of the society. African people do not know how to exist without religion.⁹⁰ For this reason, even from the humble beginnings of Christianity in Africa, Christian beliefs and practices were seen as a danger to tribal foundations and those who ventured to embrace and flirt with the Whiteman’s religion might not have fully understood what they were embracing. The fate of the early adherents to Christianity was swift and total. They were forced to move into Christian

⁸⁷ Atang, Ade Luke (2000) *The struggle for the Catholic priesthood*, Macaos

⁸⁸ Souvenir, St. Gabriel’s Parish Bafmeng silver Jubilee 1965-1990

⁸⁹ Fonlon Bernard cited op.

⁹⁰ Mbiti, John S (1967) *African religion and philosophy*, Nairobi, p.2, Coined-Odiambo African Philosophy An Introduction , Consulate Institute of Philosophy

villages or enclaves. Converts relinquished to a large degree their position within traditional society. Former networks providing social and emotional security frequently ceased to function as such when someone chose to affiliate with the new religion. The dependence of the converts on the Church community was, by consequence, far reaching.⁹¹

Largely the work of evangelisation remained a daunting task with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Without the benefit of language, anthropological knowledge and other aids to evangelisation it seemed almost impossible to communicate so deep a mystery. The African mind-set and worldview were fundamentally very different from the western mind-set of the missionary. Coupled with these were concrete African beliefs, which were at odds with fundamental Christian beliefs. It is partly for this reason that some people have wondered whether a true and complete conversion to Christianity is possible. Christianity made no positive attempt to incorporate ancestors and witches or song and dance into the Christian scheme.⁹² This was not always the case. For example, in the Ibo land in Nigeria, Shanahan was to find out that Ekwenze was a formidable enemy, that jujus had strange and unaccounted powers of evil and that bad bush was not given its name without good reason. The longer he stayed in Africa, the more conscious he became of Satan as a living active force opposed to the work of the missionary.⁹³ To counter the influence of Ekwenze, the missionaries dedicated their new mission to St. Michael the Archangel, conqueror of the forces of Satan. A large statue showing the saint crushing the demon was brought in from Europe.

The African continent has first, second, third and even fourth generation Christians. Naturally, new values are easily imbibed more successfully over successive generations. One of the questions, which have not eluded the attention and interest of missiologists is the question of motives underlying mass conversions of Africans to Christianity. Nevertheless, full conversion is never a point in history: it is always a process affecting the inner man and his total environment. It may take several generations to reach maturity in a

⁹¹ De Vries, J. op. cit

⁹²Mbiti, John (1967) African religion and philosophy East African Educational Publishers Nairobi, 237

⁹³ Forrestal Desmond,(1990) The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan, Dublin: Veritas Publications

given community. But even then it requires a continual renewal if the conversion is to become relevant at every given moment in history.⁹⁴

Evangelisation and Conversion Models in Africa

Conversion models and circumstances in African societies seem radically different from what was obtained in the western world. Religion followed the crown in the Christianisation process of Europe but in Africa, the crown in many places posed an obstacle to the Christian religion and conversion of traditional rulers was not almost out of question. In many instances, the traditional rulers welcomed Christianity mainly for the benefit of education and healthcare Christianity could bring. Christianity expanded rapidly in the first half of this century through the joint effort of overseas missionaries and African converts. Schools became the nurseries of Christian congregations. The same buildings were used as schools from Monday to Friday and as churches on Saturdays (for the catechumenate) and Sundays (for worship). It is the Africans who have been to school that were most deeply affected by modern changes.⁹⁵

Missionaries constantly presented education as bait. In some cases, early missionaries presented Christianity as a gateway to a better life both in heaven and on earth, with material benefit accruing from well-paid employment. While enticing the village chief to send their children to school, Shanahan proposed the advantages that would come with the school. “The children of your town will come to that house every day to learn about Chuckwu. They will also learn book there and will know more than the children of other towns will. After some years in that house-for-book, they will be fit for government work and will make much money”.⁹⁶

Shanahan, in his attempts to woo the Ibos to Christianity, frequently presented education as bait, believing that it was very difficult to achieve large scale conversion among adults because their minds had already been formed. Adults were also entangled in a web of tribal relationship that made sudden changes in lifestyle very difficult. School would act as a fertile ground

⁹⁴ Mbiti (1967) op. cit

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶Forristal, Desmond (1990) *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*, Dublin, Veritas Publication.

for children to listen to the doctrine. They would later be examined on their Christian faith and commitment. Once they were baptised, they would form the nucleus of the Church. As adults, they would create Christian families through marriage within the Church. They would establish their Christian community, their own parish around their own school, church and priest. It seemed so simple, but there were many 'ifs'.⁹⁷ Nowhere was this more evident than in Nigeria. Shanahan introduced a system of widespread contact in which the missionary staked his claim and moved on, leaving intensive instruction and development until later. He also made a firm commitment to education, having decided that it was possible to transform Ibo society by means of the school. He planned to use all the resources of the mission to achieve such a transformation. These decisions laid the foundation for a phenomenal expansion of the Church among the Ibo people, which was unparalleled elsewhere in Africa except in Uganda.

Africans readily responded to the bait presented by the European missionaries and African literature alludes to some of the reasons. In the novel "Arrow of God", Chinua Achebe describes the early encounter between the village of Umuaro and Christianity, going on to highlight some of their motivations. The chief priest, who was the custodian of the tribal religion, sent his son to school for ulterior motives. He told his son, "The world is fast changing, I do like it. However, I am like the bird Eneke-nti-oba. When his friend asked him why he was always on wings, he replied, 'Men of today have learnt to shoot without missing and so I have learnt to fly without perching.' I want my sons to join these people and be my eye there. If there is nothing in it, you will come back. Nevertheless, if there is something there, you will bring home my share. The world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the Whiteman today will be saying 'had we known' tomorrow. Do you not know that in the great man's household there must be people who follow all kinds of strange ways?"

The presence of a colonial power was an important factor in this progress. In 1900, the British, after nearly sixty years of trading on the Niger, began to establish a colonial administration in the area. This brought new ideas, new laws and a new authority, which challenged traditional beliefs and values. The colonial authorities never set out to dismantle the traditional

⁹⁷Ibid.

religion, but nonetheless they contributed to its eclipse. In a bid to establish law and order, the excesses of the powerful secret societies were considerably weakened. In 1901, government forces destroyed the organization of the Long juju because it had become a slave-trading ring. Gradually, traditional religion was robbed of much of its power and a void was created which Christianity was poised to fill. Initially, it was education that offered an entry point for the missionary. The Ibos developed an insatiable thirst for education, which was seen as the way forward for the tribe in the new dispensation. Education opened the door to the employment opportunities offered by the colonial administration and became the focus of intense competition among rival clans and villages.

Every village wanted a school and was prepared to pay for it. The government, too, was keen to develop an educational programme and, in 1903 offered to assist education by means of grants and professional supervision. The Churches, as voluntary agencies involved in education, were eligible for these grants on condition that they guaranteed that religion would be an optional subject on the curriculum. The Anglican Church Missionary Society refused to accept this condition and had to forgo government aid for a time. Joseph Shanahan agreed to the condition, having judged rightly that the vast majority of parents would have no objection to their children being instructed in the Whiteman's religion. He cooperated fully with the government and sat on a Commission for Education, which was established in 1906.

He accomplished his objective by stationing priests in a few strategic places, where they would open a school and then use their best students as temporary teachers for subsidiary bush schools in the surrounding areas. After a time these apprentices would be replaced by other students. They would then return to finish their own training whereupon they would go out to open new schools and the snowballing process would continue in geometric progression. After a few years of this procedure, the original mission became the vibrant centre of an enthusiastic Christian generation.

The school finally broke down the barriers that had stood for so long between the missionaries and the Ibo people. Joseph Shanahan wrote in 1912 in a letter to Rome, "So far we cannot but congratulate ourselves on the fidelity of children and on the goodwill of the pagans. The school keeps the missionary in contact with the people because the children give him free entry into every house. He is no longer a stranger, but a member of the

family. This fact alone makes what he can affect and what he can prevent, incalculable. He is known everywhere and he alone can go through the country without danger. Other Europeans dare not move about the country unescorted. But at the very moment of writing, our presence is being demanded in some fifty towns.”⁹⁸

Christian Villages and Early Converts to Christianity

Closely connected to this are evangelisation models that have been used in many African countries. Evangelisation models inevitably lead to a specific pattern of Christian thought, behaviour and ecclesial communities. A classical case was the work of the Holy Ghost Missionary in eastern Nigeria. The French missionaries fancied the concept of Christian villages in Africa. These villages were intended to be settlements where new converts could live a full Christian life without interference from their pagan neighbours and build up a Christian presence in the country. In Nigeria, these villages had become places where the outcasts of the society were taking refuge, including former slaves – some of them runaways, others bought by the mission funds collected in Europe - abandoned children, orphans, cripples, lepers, homeless old people, criminals and murderers. There were also those who for one reason or another could not fit into the traditional tribal pattern.⁹⁹ To look after such people and bring them the faith was undoubtedly the work of charity. They were draining the small resources of the missions and they were hardly the kind of people on which a flourishing church could be built. The rest of the people were certainly going to regard Christian religion with contempt, as something fit only for slaves and outcast.

The early converts could as well rejoice at Paul’s words to the Corinthians. “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may

⁹⁸ Thomas Kiggins (1991) *Maynooth Mission to Africa. The story of St. Patrick’s Kiltegan*. Gill and Macmillan.

⁹⁹ Forrestal D. Op. Cit.

boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”¹⁰⁰ Commenting on this passage, Pope Benedict XVI went on to say, “We must add a further point of view. The First Letter to the Corinthians(1:18-31) tells us that many of the early Christians belonged to the lower social strata and precisely for this reason were open to the experience of new hope, as we saw in the example of Bakhita. Yet from the beginning, there were also conversions in the aristocratic and cultured circles.”¹⁰¹ The philosophy of the early missionary endeavour seems to have been that to build a Christian edifice sure, secure and solid, you had to create a cultural void. To men so dedicated, who braved the wild unknown to plant the cross and spread the word, it appeared a priori dangerous to concede that there was in African culture anything on which a genuine Christianity could be built. Their ardent zeal, their candid fervour led them instinctively to dump the whole lot of it as totally pernicious. If you made one concession, however innocent, you did not know where it would end. The convert must be voided and washed clean and shorn of the mind he had inherited from heathen ancestors. Today, this policy is bitterly inveighed against by the protagonist of African culture. Was this policy right or wrong? That is a pointless quarrel; each policy or philosophy or institution must be judged in the light of the zeitgeist in which it prevailed.¹⁰² In this Christian village, daily Mass and communion, as a matter of course, became the centre of life. There were protracted community prayers morning and evening, doctrine classes at dawn and dusk for children and catechumens and once every week for the young and the grown-ups, weekly confessions and extra religious knowledge classes daily on the school timetable. Thrice every day the angelus rang out, at break of the day, at noon and at sundown and every one stood where he was to commemorate the incarnation.¹⁰³

The early Christian converts were often regarded with scorn. Achebe in his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, gives us an idea of these early converts. None of his early converts was a man whose words were heeded in the assembly of

¹⁰⁰1corinthians 1:26-31

¹⁰¹Encyclical letter Encyclical letter Spe et Salve on Christian hope no. 5

¹⁰² Fonlon op. Cit.

¹⁰³ Fonlon op. Cit.

the people. None of them was a man of title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called *efulefu*, worthless empty men. The imagery of an *efulefu* in the language of the clan was a man who sold his machete and wore the sheath to battle. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the tribe and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat them up.¹⁰⁴

Not only were the early Christians regarded with scorn and disdain, they were often made to be the prey. It is precisely for this reason that the land allocated to them was, in the minds of the people, spiritually the most difficult land to inhabit. Achebe offers more insights into the idea of bad bush or evil forest. Every clan and village had its own evil forest. In it were buried all those who died of the evil diseases, like leprosy and small pox. It was also the dumping ground for the potent fetishes of great medicine men when they died. An evil forest was, therefore, alive with the sinister forces and power of darkness. It was such a forest that the missionaries were usually given to settle. The village elders were not keen on having missionaries in their villages and so made the missionaries became the prey of demonic spirits. They gave the missionaries the forest with the hope that no one in his right frame of mind would accept. Forristal, quoting from an Ibo chronicler, writes that “the priest had been asked not to touch the bush because it was bad bush and the haunt of evil spirits. As work went on, the children contracted various diseases. Some of them died, some were very sick and others were paralysed. The power of the *juju* and the fetish is one of the perennial unsolved mysteries of African life”.¹⁰⁵ In the Bamenda highlands, the story was not different in terms of the hill given to the first catechist, Martin Atang. His efforts to find a suitable site for the mission led him to His Highness Ndefru, “the then Fon of Mankon, who allocated the then site known as “Ntaah Satan” – Satan hill- to the Catholic Church. This is the present Mission site.”¹⁰⁶

The Protestant and Catholic forms of Christianity separated Africans from their society and put them on the side of the Europeans.¹⁰⁷ It was a system that had so many shortcomings. In Nigeria, a change was soon

¹⁰⁴Achebe, Chinua (1981) *Things Fall Apart*, The New Windmill series p.130

¹⁰⁵Cf Forristal (1990) *op. cit.*, p.112

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.cathedralparishmankon.com>

¹⁰⁷ Mbiti, J, *op. cit.*

initiated when it was discovered that Christian villages would lead them nowhere. However, if there were to be any meaningful future for the missions, a change of strategy was necessary. The missions were no longer to be a refuge for the work-shy and the unwanted. No more motherless babies were to be accepted. .. Lepers, cripples, old women, children would all have to give whatever help they could to support themselves and the mission.¹⁰⁸ Before this reversal in policy, the work was confined to a few mission stations close to the Niger River, in towns and villages already influenced by British administration and trade. The early adherents were, for the most part, former slaves who had been ransomed by the missionaries or liberated by the British authorities. These were grouped together in villages where it was hoped they would live the Christian life and become bearers of Christianity to the surrounding countryside. The custom of grouping people in villages under the authority of the missionary existed in South America in the early sixteenth century and was used to great effect by Jesuit missionaries, especially in Paraguay, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In nineteenth century Africa, the Christian village emerged again in Catholic and Protestant missions.¹⁰⁹

No sooner had a settlement been effected than the missionaries began to experience the difficulties of life in a tribal area. The last thing they desired was to create a new separate Africa; yet again and again they found themselves at the centre of a new settlement, made up of freed slave children, of men who for some reason had lost their identity with their tribe, of criminals (murderers not excluded!) fleeing from justice and of young men who wished to learn the skills that only the Whiteman could teach.¹¹⁰ The early Christian community in Njinikom had certain features, which gradually brought it to resemble a Christian village in some sense. For example, writing about the truce shortly after the enthronement of the Fon of Kom, Fon Ndi, he announced that new churches would be permitted in three populous Kom quarters besides Njinikom, for a probationary period of six months. During this time, the Christians were expected to return to their home villages and to prove themselves amenable to the authority of the Chief and the Quarter Heads. By stimulating the establishment of Churches in various locations,

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ De Vries, J. op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Ndi hoped to disperse the Christian community at Njinikom. Most people living at Njinikom came from elsewhere and it was considered preferable that these people moved back to their own villages and families, practising their religion there.¹¹¹ The situation at Esu was in many ways a mini version of the Njinikom scenario. In 1935, a Christian settlement had been established in Esu. About 20 men with an unknown number of women and children had settled on mission grounds in a compound containing about 10 buildings.¹¹² In the nearby Nso Fondom, in Shisong, which had become a safe haven for the new converts, the only effective authority was that of the priest. The Nwerong or kwihfon, the embodiment and executor of the chiefly power, revered and feared throughout Nso country, feared being unmasked and beaten if he set foot in Shisong. There was a song in my childhood days: “Shisong she kwenni she nyuy” - this Shisong, once of the Fon’s, now is of God.¹¹³

The Sixas, though not a Christian villages in any sense, certainly operated with the same philosophy as Christian villages. Mongo Beti in his Novel “The Poor Christ of Bomba”, describes a similar phenomenon in the southern part of Cameroon which was under French rule and under the auspices of the Holy Ghost Missionaries. “In every mission in southern Cameroon there is building that houses, in principle, all the young girls engaged to be married. This is the Sixa. All our girls who want to marry in the strict Catholic way may stay in the Sixa for two to four months, except in exceptional cases, which are always many. The defenders of this institution praise its usefulness, if not its necessity.”¹¹⁴

Theological Underpinnings of Missionary Fervour and Flavour

Missionary zeal was unlike the zeal of colonialists and had its own puzzles. Missionary zeal was fanned by a belief of the time surrounding salvation of souls. To fully understand the motivations, a short historical survey of this belief may be of interest. Following the discovery of the new world, it suddenly became clear that there were millions in the shadow of

¹¹¹ Mbiti J, op. cit

¹¹² De Vries op. cit

¹¹³ Fonlon Bernard: A simple story Simply Told (1983) CEPER Yaoundé

¹¹⁴ Mongo Beti, The Poor Christ of Bomba, Heinemann p.5

death, certainly on the road to perdition without any means of obtaining salvation. For centuries, the Church was convinced that the gospel had reached the ends of the earth. It was on this account that Pope Benedict XV said, “Anyone who studies the facts of this great saga cannot help being profoundly impressed by them: by all the stupendous hardships our missionaries have undergone in extending the Faith, the magnificent devotion they have shown and the overwhelming examples of intrepid endurance they have afforded us. Moreover, to anyone who weighs these facts the realization must come as a shock that right now, there remain in the world immense multitudes of people who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death. According to a recent estimate, the number of non-believers in the world approximates one billion souls.”¹¹⁵

Even up to 1958 Pope Pius XII, in his encyclical, *Ad Apostolorum Principis*, could rightly say, “We teach, we declare that the Roman Church by the providence of God holds the primacy of ordinary power over all others and that this is the power of jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff, which is truly Episcopal and immediate...there is one flock of the Church of Christ under one supreme shepherd. This is the teaching of the Catholic truth from which no one can depart without loss of faith and salvation.”¹¹⁶ When the missionaries appeared on the horizons of the African continent during the second wave of evangelisation in the nineteenth century, the theology of mission spurring them on was more or less the same. Like the missionary congregations of the time, the theology of mission of the St. Joseph’s Society for Foreign Missions was in no doubt perfectly in line with the theology of mission of the time. St. Joseph’s Society for Foreign Missions, which carried out most of the work of primary evangelisation of the present day Ecclesiastical Province of Bamenda, was instituted to “Labour for souls that are most abandoned and in the greatest need - that is, for the heathen and unevangelized races.”

¹¹⁵Benedict XV. *Maximum Illud*: Apostolic Letter on the Propagation of the Faith Throughout the World. 30 November 1919. Translated by Thomas J. M. Burke, SJ Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Office, no. 6

¹¹⁶ Pope Pius XII, *Ad Apostolorum Principis* encyclical letter on communism and the Church in china no.46

The society's constitution of 1930 went on to state their motives as follows:

“A single soul, redeemed by the most Precious Blood, is of greater intrinsic worth than the whole material globe on which we live. In some sense it is worth the infinite price that has been paid for its redemption. Then, one soul admitted into Heaven will render throughout all eternity a greater honour to God than was rendered on Him by the lives of great Saints on earth. The lives of these latter were of short duration and were attended by some degree of infirmity and sin; whereas the life of a soul in Heaven is eternal and without any, even the slightest, admixture of imperfection. The honour and glory to God arising from the salvation of a single soul, whom we may have conducted to Heaven unspeakable a privilege, therefore, to be invited by God to spend a short life here in labouring for the eternal salvation of souls! Think of the horrible destruction of souls going on ceaselessly day and night. Their spiritual wreckage covers land and sea. The enemy of God and man is sleepless in his activity and myriads of evil spirits and of human beings are his agents. He never tires and when defeated begins again. His object is to destroy the work of the Redemption and to fill hell with souls. Regions of the world seem to be his by right of conquest and he strives to obtain possession of every member of the human race. Think, too, of the most pitiable condition of the heathen world, which, though it has not apostatised from Christianity, lies buried in darkness, bound hand and foot in slavery to Satan. It is awaiting in its deep misery the blessed advent of Christ in the person of the ministers of salvation.

Next, by an inscrutable decree of Providence, even man's eternal salvation is made to depend upon the zeal of his brother man. How few hunger and thirst for God's honour! Explorers and traders think nothing of risking their fortunes and their lives for a little worldly gain and a vain bubble of honour. Men face the severest sufferings and privations to attain some purely human objects. But how few act thus for God, or trust Him to repay in another world their labours to extend His kingdom and to promote His honour and His name in this! It is this want of faith, this worldliness and hardness of heart in Christians that leaves the great Mass of humanity still sitting in the cold region of the shadow of death.

Then let the members of St. Joseph's Society brace themselves to undertake the most arduous labours, by contemplating the lives of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles and of all the Apostles of Jesus Christ, who, in age after age, have spent their lives and shed their blood for the salvation of souls. Their weary journeying, their continuous teaching, their manifold perils and privations, their bitter sufferings and death are now all over, while they have entered for eternity into the glory and bliss of the Beatific Vision. What they believed, we believe; what they loved, we can love; what they did, what they endured, we, by God's grace, can do and endure. Whither they are gone-into the bosom of the Triune God-we also, by following in their footsteps, can surely go.

Finally, the thought of all that God has done for us individually cannot fail to inspire a generous nature with a desire to co-operate with Him in the work of His special predilection, the salvation of souls. Let a man contemplate all that is generous and loving on the part of God and personal to himself in the Divine acts of his creation, preservation and redemption; let him follow, if he can, the wondrous thread of God's graces and mercies to him, running through every day and hour of his existence and realise how entirely and absolutely dependent he is upon God for everything; let him try to measure how great, how wise, how good and generous and loving God is, both in Himself and towards His children and he will thirst for opportunities wherein to prove his gratitude and will say with the Apostle of the Gentiles."¹¹⁷

On August 10, 1863, Pope Pius IX made public his encyclical, "Quanto Conficiamur Moerore", on the promotion of false doctrine. Among other points, the Pope went on to say:

"Here, too, our beloved sons and venerable brothers, it is again necessary to mention and censure a very grave error entrapping some Catholics who believe that it is possible to arrive at eternal salvation although living in error and alienated from the true faith and Catholic unity. Such belief is certainly opposed to Catholic teaching. Also well-known is the Catholic teaching that no one can be saved outside the Catholic Church. Eternal salvation cannot be obtained by those who oppose the authority and statements of the same Church and are

¹¹⁷Constitutions of St. Joseph's Society for Foreign Mission, 1930

stubbornly separated from the unity of the Church and from the successor of Peter, the Roman Pontiff, to whom 'the custody of the vineyard has been committed by the Saviour.' The words of Christ are clear enough: 'If he refuses to listen even to the Church, let him be to you a Gentile and a tax collector'; 'He who hears you hears me and he who rejects you, rejects me and he who rejects me, rejects him who sent me'; 'He who does not believe will be condemned'; 'He who does not believe is already condemned'; 'He who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters.' The Apostle Paul says that such persons are 'perverted and self-condemned'; the Prince of the Apostles calls them 'false teachers . . . who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master . . . bringing upon themselves swift destruction.'"¹¹⁸

Retrospective View of Missionary Methods

To any onlooker, the missionary methods used by the MILL HILL Missionaries in southern Cameroon were, in some instances, violent enough to cause outrage and, in fact, they did. However to fully understand these methods, a brief historical survey of methods used by various missionaries at various times may be of some importance. The missionaries who laboured generously in Cameroon were following closely in the footsteps of their predecessors.

After 400 AD, St. Augustine gradually came to the conviction that external pressure had a role to play. To provide the individual with the opportunity to flee eternal damnation could not be wrong and certainly justified the use of pressure. But Augustine confined coercive methods to fines, confiscation of property and exile. Taking the cue from the Gospel according to Luke 14:23, where it is said, "go out to the country roads and lanes and make people come in, so that my house will be full." He went on to say:

"I myself have yielded to the evidence afforded by these instances which my colleagues have laid before me. For originally my opinion was that no one should be coerced into the unity of Christ and that we must act only by words, fight only by arguments and prevail by force of reason,

¹¹⁸ Pope Pius IX, Promotion of false doctrines, August 10, 1863 no.7

lest we should have those whom we knew as avowed heretics feigning themselves to be Catholics. But this opinion of mine was overcome, not by the word of those who controverted it, but by the conclusive instance to which they could point”.¹¹⁹ “There is a persecution of unrighteousness, which the impious inflict upon the Church of Christ, but there is a righteous persecution which the Church of Christ inflicts upon the impious. Moreover, she persecutes in the spirit of love, while they in the spirit of wrath. Wherefore, if the power which the Church received by divine providence is due season, through the religiosity and the faith of Emperors, be the instrument by which those on the highways and at the hedges- that is those in heresies and schisms- are compelled to come in, then let them find no fault with being compelled, but concede to what they are being so compelled: it is to the Supper of the Lord, which is the unity of the Body of Christ.”¹²⁰

With the articulation of the views of Augustine and gradual imbibing of this mentality, the Church embarked on a series of methods whose main aim was to force people to become Christians. Gregory the Great two centuries later sanctioned the use of subtle methods to force non-Christians to accept baptism. He admonished Sardinian landowners that their peasant labourers were to be overburdened with rent; that the weight of this punitive exaction should make them hasten to righteousness. This was not all; those who were adamant and would stubbornly refuse to become Christians were to be chastised by beating and torture. This was the lot of slaves, but for those who were freemen they were to be jailed. Among the methods that were used in the Middle Ages to coerce people to become Christians was the granting or withdrawal of rights. Non-Christians did not have the same political and economic rights as Christians and once they were baptised they were granted the same political and economic rights as their fellow Christians. It was therefore politically and economically advantageous to become Christian.

¹¹⁹ Letter 93; 16f of 408; wholesome coercion in Jurgens William, (1992) *The Faith of Our Fathers* Volume one Theological publications in India.

¹²⁰ St. Augustine's Letter 185:11.24 of 417, on Luke 14:23 "Compel them to come in!" in Jurgens William, (1992) *The Faith of Our Fathers* Volume one Theological publications in India.

Already in the second or third century, Christianity was carried to the Britons and the Germans on the borders of the Rhine. But these were sporadic efforts with transient results. The work did not begin in earnest until the sixth century and then it went vigorously forward to the tenth and twelfth, though with many checks and temporal lapses caused by civil wars and foreign invasions. In the Middle Ages the Jews became the object of the Church's missionary efforts. The method and efforts at converting the Jews were not very different from those used against the heretics. Those who refused to convert to Christianity were sometimes threatened with expulsion and even execution. It was Pope Gregory the Great who opted for the contrary. For him Jews were to be brought to the Christian faith by mildness, generosity and persuasion.

Medieval Christianisation was a wholesale conversion or a conversion of nations under the command of their leaders. It was carried out not only by the missionaries and by spiritual means, but also by political influence, alliances of heathen princes with Christian wives and in some cases by military force. It was a conversion not to the primary Christianity inspired by the apostles as laid down in the New Testament, but to the secondary Christianity of ecclesiastical tradition as taught by the Fathers of the Church, monks and Popes. It was a baptism by water rather than by the fire and the Holy Spirit. The preceding instructions amounted to little or nothing; even the baptismal formula, mechanically recited in Latin, was scarcely understood. The rude barbarians, owing to the weakness of their heathen religion, readily submitted to the new religion; but some tribes yielded to the sword of the conqueror. The superficial, wholesale conversion to nominal Christianity must be regarded in the light of the infant baptism.¹²¹

The missionaries of the Middle Ages were nearly all monks. They were generally men of limited education and narrow views, but of devoted zeal and heroic self-denial. Accustomed to primitive simplicity of life, detached from all earthly ties, trained to all sorts of deprivations, ready for any amount of labour and commanding attention and veneration by their unusual habits - their celibacy, fasting and constant devotions - they were upon the whole the best pioneers of Christianity and civilisations among the savage races of

¹²¹ Schaff, Philip History of the Christian Church, Volume IV: Mediaeval Christianity. A.D. 590-1073.

northern and western Europe.¹²² The conversion of Russia followed the way of other nations in Europe. Vladimir sent emissaries to both Rome and Constantinople to see the religion at work. The visitors to Constantinople were overwhelmed with the grandeur and splendour of the services at the majestic Church of St. Sophia and, thus, highly recommended eastern orthodoxy. Vladimir was baptised in 988. His twelve sons followed his example and the Russian people accepted Christianity en masse. When enough priests could not be found to baptise them, thousands lined up at the River Kiev and immersed themselves. Russia thus entered Christendom in 989. Russia began to lift itself out of its barbarism to establish the beginning of a great civilisation which was to stand the test of time.¹²³

The Age of Exploration and Colonization

With the dawn of the era of exploration, discovery and colonization, the Christian world discovered with shock that after fifteen centuries of evangelisation there were still millions of people who knew nothing of salvation and who, because they were not baptised, were heading for eternal damnation. Colonization of non-Christian people by a Christian nation was not new. In earlier centuries, it was a European nation colonizing a European nation, where the conquered people accepted Christianity and were assimilated into the prevailing culture. What was essentially new with the wave of colonization in the sixteenth century was the colonization of people who had a different colour, language and culture from that of the colonizing power.

However, with the European expansion into the new world, the dark page of slavery was opened. Slavery was not new. It is as old as the history of man's attempt to dominate his fellow man and bring him under his command. From the Roman Empire to the sixteenth century, slavery had nothing to do with race or colour of the skin. However, once the new world was discovered, the colour bar began to manifest itself in the most ferocious and vicious form. Only people of the "inferior" race could become slaves. This had consequences for Christian missions, as we shall see later and

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Bill R Austin (1983), *Austin's Topical history of Christianity*, Tyndale Publishers, Inc. pg. 95

persisted as an issue well into and even beyond the twentieth century. Upon the discovery of America, an army of apostolic men set out for the New World. This great host, which included that glorious son of St. Dominic, Bartholomew de Las Casas, undertook the twin tasks of protecting the unfortunate natives from human oppression and wresting them from their grinding subjection to the powers of darkness. Bartolome de las Casas (1478-1566), the Dominican missionary to Latin America, confronted the centuries-old idea that violence was the way to convert people to Christianity. As a pastor, he developed advice for a missionary that is still relevant today. He rejected the horrible lie that the atrocities of conquest and exploitation were the way to convert people. He wrote that Jesus Christ did not give his apostles “power to punish the unwilling by any force, pressure or harshness.”¹²⁴

In September 1510, under the leadership of Pedro de Cordova, he landed with the first band of Dominicans in Hispaniola. He was the first, in 1511, to denounce publicly in America the enslavement and oppression of the Indians as sinful and disgraceful to the Spanish nation. Being censured for this, he was forcefully sent to Spain in 1512, where he pleaded the cause of the Indians so successfully that the king took immediate measures towards ameliorating their condition. In December 1511, a Dominican preacher, Father Fray, Antonio de Montesino preached a fiery sermon that implicated the colonists in the genocide of the native peoples. He is said to have preached, “Tell me by what right of justice do you hold these Indians in such a cruel and horrible servitude? On what authority have you waged such detestable wars against these people who dealt quietly and peacefully on their own lands? Wars in which you have destroyed such an infinite number of them by homicides and slaughters never heard of before. Why do you keep them so oppressed and exhausted, without giving them enough to eat or curing them of the sicknesses they incur from the excessive labour you give them and they die, or rather you kill them, in order to extract and acquire gold every day.”¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Carol Koch (1994) *The Catholic Church, journey wisdom and mission*. St. Mary's Press

¹²⁵ Carol Koch (1994) *The Catholic Church, journey wisdom and mission*. St. Mary's Press

The early missionaries to Latin America had the most unfortunate task of preaching to a people enslaved by their own compatriots. How were they to convince the natives of these countries of the need to be saved when their fellow compatriots were the very persons whose practice of religion was mere religiosity, not more than skin deep? Missionaries depended on the very colonizers for help, protection and even finance. With the introduction of the patronage system, missionaries had to walk on a tightrope. It was tantamount to biting the hand that fed them.

In 1492, the same year the Moors were expelled from Spain, Columbus made his historic voyage to the Americas. Within the next three decades global exploration was expanded by the various voyages of Vasca De Gama, who reached India around the Cape of Good Hope in 1498, after which additional explorations by the Portuguese were made into the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, the spice Islands and into the Pacific Ocean, where they made landfall in Japan in 1543. Throughout the early 16th Century, the rulers of Western Europe were financing the exploration of the globe with dreams of expanded empires as their motive. The impetus toward building empires set much of the stage for the drama of St. Francis Xavier's missionary efforts to Japan. St. Francis Xavier was selected as the head of missions to Asia for the Jesuit Order, but he also represented the Crown of Portugal as a political emissary. Arriving in Japan in 1549, Francis Xavier and his companions began their work of spreading the gospel in a land where Buddhism and Shintoism were the predominant religions. One of Xavier's companions described some of their methods in the following words, "we preached in the streets without any licence or permission of the king, taking up our position at cross roads where people thronged ...some merely listened to kill time, others to have their ears tickled with novelties and many more just to make a sport of us. A few showed us marks of affection and pity."¹²⁶

Francis Xavier, a missionary worthy of comparison with the Apostles themselves, "for Christ's glory and the salvation of souls spent himself relentlessly in the East Indies and in Japan. And when he died he was on the threshold of the Chinese Empire, attempting to enter it. It was as though, at the price of his death, he was breaking open for the Gospel a way into those

¹²⁶ Carol Koch (1994) *The Catholic Church, journey wisdom and mission*. St. Mary's Press p. 223

vast territories that in years to come would be the arena where the sons of numerous religious orders and missionary congregations would, in the pursuance of their apostolate, contend with all the formidable obstacles thrown against them by shifting conditions and varying circumstances.”¹²⁷

In 1537, the Pope used his temporal and spiritual power to authorise the opening of a slave market in Lisbon where Africans were sold annually for transportation to the West Indies. Slave trade and evangelisation went hand in hand. With the discovery of the sea route to India, Pope Alexander VI divided the world outside Europe between the king of Portugal and Spain, granting them full authority over all the territories they had discovered as well as those still to be discovered. Here lies the origin of the right of the patronage according to which rulers of the two countries (i.e. Spain and Portugal) had dominion over their colonies not only in political matters but also in the spiritual and Church matters. The ruling by which the king of Spain and Portugal were made patrons of the missionary expansions in their colonies made the propagation of faith and colonial policies so intertwined that it was often hard if not impossible to distinguish the one from the other. Bishops could only be appointed with the king’s approval and could not communicate with the Pope directly. In the Papal Bull, *Inter Caetera*, on the 4th of May 1493, Pope Alexander VI wrote,

“We therefore are rightly led and hold it as our duty, to grant you even of our own accord and in your favour those things whereby with effort each day hearty you may be enabled for the honour of God himself and the spread of the Christian rule to carry forward your holy and praiseworthy purpose so pleasing to immortal God...and in order that you may enter upon so great an undertaking with greater readiness and heartiness endowed with the benefit of our apostolic favour, we, of our own accord not at your instance nor the request of anyone else in your regard but out of our sole largess and certain knowledge and out of fullness of our apostolic power, by the authority of the almighty God conferred upon us in blessed Peter .. said islands that have been found by your envoys and captains, give, grant and assign to you and your heirs and successors, forever together with all their dominions cities, camps, places and villages and all rights, jurisdictions and appurtenances, all islands, mainland found and to be found.”¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Maximum Illud no. 4.

¹²⁸ Pope Alexander, (1493) Papal Bull VI *Inter Caetera*

The creation of the patronage system was in the years to come to prove fatal to the Church itself. In some cases, Rome was only an observer as the powerful monarchs of Spain and Portugal determined not only the colonial policy, but also the missionary policies to be followed as well as the missionaries to be sent or approved for missions. To forestall such a situation, the Church responded by creating the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith, assigning exclusively and directly to the Pope the entire missionary activity and efforts.

In 1926, Pope Pius XI in his Encyclical, *Rerum Ecclesiae*, on the missions addressed many issues that were of particular importance for African Churches. Apart from determining the missionary policies of the colonies, the king of Spain forbade the training of natives as priests. Thus, the indigenes saw the Church as a foreign institution in which they would always be second-class members. Pope Pius went on to say:

“Anyone who looks upon these natives as members of an inferior race or as men of low mentality makes a grievous mistake. Experience over a long period of time has proven that the inhabitants of those remote regions of the East and of the South frequently are not inferior to us at all and are capable of holding their own with us, even in mental ability. If one discovers an extreme lack of the ability to understand among those who live in the very heart of certain barbarous countries, this is largely due to the conditions under which they exist, for since their daily needs are so limited, they are not often called upon to make use of their intellects. You, Venerable Brothers and Beloved Sons, can bear testimony to the truth of what we write and we Ourselves can testify to these facts since We have here under Our very eyes the example of certain native students attending the colleges of Rome who not only are equal to the other students in ability and in the results they obtain in their studies, but frequently even surpass them.. Therefore, there should exist no discrimination of any kind between priests, be they European missionaries or natives, there must be no line of demarcation marking one off from the other. Let all priests, missionaries and natives be united with one another in the bonds of mutual respect and love.”¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Pope Pius XI (1926) *Rerum Ecclesiae* On Catholic Mission No. 6

Corporal Punishment in the Missions

Some of the practices applied by the early missionaries may seem shocking, judging with the mentality of today. The whole issue of missionary methods cannot but leave one unsettled. What the MILL HILL missionaries adopted in Cameroon raised eyebrows and provoked deputations to be sent to the colonial hierarchy. In a lengthy and detailed confidential memorandum addressed to the Resident, The Divisional Officer for Kumba Division Bryan Sharwood Smith elaborated on the various complaints raised against the Catholic Mission. Several excessive and repeated flogging sessions had been organised by Father Van Dal and Father Moran, assisted by Catechist Epie. Van Dal reportedly administered floggings on Lawrence Nkumo of Meket and Benedict Ndue and Athanasius Kome of Baseng over accusations involving adultery. This was not completely out of the blues. A look into the past four or five centuries would have left no one astounded. For example, the Jesuits, who championed the reformation, employed all possible measures to force Christians who had fallen away back into the Catholic fold or to combat the influence of Protestant churches. For example, in an article titled, "How to fight Heresy," Ignatius of Loyola, loyal to the spirit of his time, gave Peter Canisius, the Emperor's adviser, energetic advice on combating protestant heresy in Austria:

"Once a man has been convicted of heretical impiety or strongly suspected of it, he has no right to any honour or riches: on the contrary, these must be stripped from him. To make a few examples by condemning some to death or exile along with the confiscation of their goods, will show that one is taking religious affairs seriously and the remedy will be all the more effective. If public professors or administrators at the university of Vienna or the other universities have a bad reputation in relation to the Catholic faith, they must be deprived of their degrees. All heretical books must be burned or sent beyond all the provinces of the kingdom. This is appropriate treatment for the productions of heretics, even if their content is not heretical, as with the grammar, rhetoric, or dialectic of Melanchthon. It is necessary to be able to exclude them as a sign of antipathy to the heresy of their author."¹³⁰

¹³⁰Ignatius of Loyola to Peter Canisius, 13 August 1554.

One of these methods applied was public punishment and this did not rule out corporal punishment. Public sanctions were imposed on defaulters, both men and women alike. They were required to work in the mission compound for weeks and even months in some cases before they were allowed to receive the sacrament of reconciliation. In some cases, it went beyond manual work. Some of the missionaries blatantly violated prevailing guidelines for missionary conduct, which stated that, "Like his model, the Lord Jesus, the good missionary burns with charity and he numbers even the most abandoned unbelievers among God's children, redeemed like everyone else with the ransom of the divine blood. Their lowly difference does not exasperate him; their immorality does not dishearten him. His bearing toward them is neither scornful nor fastidious; his treatment of them is neither harsh nor rough. Instead, he makes use of all the arts of Christian kindness to attract them to him, so that he may eventually lead them into the arms of Christ, into the embrace of the Good Shepherd. He makes it a custom to ponder the thought expressed in Holy Scripture."¹³¹ Corporal punishment was not totally ruled out as a sanction in the missions. It was a matter of public knowledge that the officials of the Catholic mission, both European and Africans, made a regular practice of inflicting corporal punishment on their followers for any moral lapse or lack of discipline so long as these punishments occasioned no harm and were inflicted with the consent of those punished.¹³²

Women and Marriage in the Christian Villages

This work which is basically a study of the Christian villages of Shisong, Esu, Njinikom and Baseng shows that the response of women to the mission, the attitude of the mission towards the women concerned and the positions assumed by both traditional and colonial rulers in this regard, proved to be a persistent source of conflict. The frequent running away of wives be they wives of the Fon or of commoners, to seek refuge at the mission indicates that women utilized Christianity to negotiate for increased autonomy in a male-dominated world. They took shrewd advantage of the

¹³¹ Benedict XV op. cit.

¹³² Annet to the Registrar 16/11/28 in Ndi Anthony (2004) MILL HILL Missionaries in Southern Cameroon, Nairobi

shift in social relations whereby control was slipping out of the hands of the traditional authorities and elders into the impersonal hands of the colonial state. The phenomenon of runaway wives was certainly a common strategy pursued by women to escape from marriages perceived, for whatever reason, to be unsatisfactory. Women's refusal to marry their appointed husbands, their desertion of unwanted husbands and their flight to missions and urban areas, were interpreted, correctly, as a serious threat to African male authority and, thereby, to the entire system of Indirect Rule. Everywhere, the perceived threat to patriarchal authority led to streams of protests by polygamists against the "seduction" of their wives, claims of sexual promiscuity among the runaway women and so forth. In the Grass Fields, traditional, colonial and mission authorities joined hands to ensure that male control over women was maintained, though they did not necessarily agree as to exactly how that was to be organized. Control over women was particularly essential as women represented both a source of labour and a source of income in the form of the bride price paid to their fathers.



Missionaries depended on the good will of the traditional rulers. Here is Fon Abumbi I of Bafut who resisted the presence of Catholic Missionaries in his Fandom

The response of women to the presence of the mission illustrated sufficiently the interests of patriarchal authorities in maintaining control over

women. It was a phenomenon that shattered the foundations of a once patriarchal society. "During the trouble in Bafut, the parents of Angela Ngum, a girl of ten years, gave her to the old chief according to their native customs. She came to doctrine classes, although her parents tried to stop her. They informed the chief that the wife had joined the Catholic Christians ... on the next day she was led along the road to Kom. On the following day, the chief sent three of his big men to Njinikom to force her back to Bafut. They went first to the chief of Bikom and the chief told them to go and search in Njinikom."¹³³ The issue of infant marriages and runaway wives seeking refuge in the missions was a widespread problem.

In retrospect the methods used by the MILL HILL missionaries must be evaluated within the context in which they were applied. One of the main objections to the methods of the MILL HILL Mission in the Cameroons was the disruptive influence which the Mission had brought to bear upon the social organization of the native community. This influence was particularly noxious in view of the fact that the existing social organization was the fundamental basis upon which depended the successful constitutional development of the area through the medium of Native Administration. Native Administrations were part of the machinery of Government in the Mandated Territory and the policy of the Mission appeared to have been aimed at defying them and breaking them up. This subversive action on the part of the Mission must, therefore, be regarded as aimed at the mandatory Government as well as the Native Administrations.

The policy of the Mission favoured the establishment of Christian enclaves in which adherents were welcomed and allowed to settle and live in disregard of the traditional authority of their family or clan and in defiance of the Native Administration. In 1927, it was found necessary to prosecute 25 inhabitants of a Mission Compound for refusal to pay tax. The defaulting tax-payers claimed that, as they contributed largely in money and unpaid labour to the Mission, they were no longer obliged to honour their fiscal obligation to the government. These methods were a source of friction not only between the missions and traditional rulers but also between the missions and colonial authorities.

¹³³The story of Angela Ngum in O'Neil Robert(1995) *Mission to the Southern Cameroons*, Burns and Oates



Inauguration of the present Sbisong catholic church, Christmas 1965

Both colonial and traditional rulers lamented over the fact that these enclaves had been allowed to take root in the first place. “A great deal of mischief seems to have arisen from the mistake of allowing enclaves on Mission Compounds to come into existence. Local custom vested the head of the family or village with considerable power. It was not, therefore, surprising that, with the establishment of these religion cliques living in artificial compounds and separated from their rulers, the traditional and lawful authority or the head of the house might have been usurped by the head of the Mission Compound, the catechist”¹³⁴.

Missionaries operated in ways that could be termed insidious. Often they approached the traditional authority with the aim of starting a school. It naturally followed that the sympathy with which the local Chiefs had originally accepted the Mission rapidly disappeared and was replaced by suspicion and distrust as the power of the catechist increased. Unfortunately, instead of endeavouring to check the growing friction between their agents and the local Chiefs, the more responsible members of the Mission appear to have encouraged their catechists to disregard the authority of the Native Courts and customary laws. The process was summed up in the following

¹³⁴ BNA- Sd/1931/5 Memorandum from the Divisional Officer Mamfe to Resident 11/06/30 Sd/1931/5

words: “First the Father comes and asks the chief to give some land to build a house or a church. The chief thinking it will be good for the country and keep his young men at home agrees to this. The Father then sends a catechist and from that day seems to have but one idea – to annoy the chief and direct his people to annoy him.”¹³⁵

The Resident in the Southern Cameroons commented on the attitude of the Fathers vis-a-vis the Native Courts, the Native Authorities and the District Officer. In exercising his powers of supervision of Native Court cases, all of them the constituted instruments of the mandatory Government, the Resident stated that the attitude of mind of the fathers was unmistakable, that if a native was employed by or recognized by the Mission, he was thereby removed from the jurisdiction of the lawful authorities of the Province and it was to the Mission that any complaint against his conduct was and had to be submitted.

A further primary cause of dissension between the people and the Mission was attributable to the Fathers and their African Catechists having inveigled children and young girls under marriageable age into baptism and into becoming catechumens without the knowledge or consent of their lawful guardians. Proselytizing among married women had also led to a great deal of friction and ill feeling towards the Mission and had done much to widen the breach with local native people. As concerns young girls, missionaries failed to appreciate the custom of childhood betrothal. When a convert became a suitor, it was common that “Every single thing the animist suitor had spent money on or service that he had rendered for a member of a girl’s family from when she was born was carefully calculated and often exaggerated so that the generally younger Christian suitor could not find the means to refund such heavy bridal wealth. Consequently the girl was either forced under such conditions to remain bonded to the old man or to run away and find solace in a Catholic mission if she was lucky. A number of cases were reported of the daughters of Chiefs and others having been converted to Christianity against the wishes of their parents and later, again without their parents’ approval, married under the auspices of the Mission. In almost every case, trouble had arisen in connection with the payment of

¹³⁵DO Mamfe to Resident 11/06/30

dowry since the parents of the girl had made other marriage arrangements according to native custom, often on the day of the girl's birth.¹³⁶

In addition to creating serious embarrassment to the Government policy of Native Administration in the Cameroons, the activities of the Mission led to infringement of the law both by European Priests and by their native following. Records of conviction and of complaints which, in the opinion of Administrative Officers could be prosecuted to conviction appeared in the personal records of individual members of the Mission.

Estrangement from their natural rulers and lawful jurisdiction led Mission adherents to look elsewhere for settlement of their disputes and the result was that the priests and catechists unlawfully usurped the powers of the Courts to a considerable extent, an offence for which they could be punished under the law. Priests held quasi-judicial enquiries, administered oaths and sentenced delinquents to flogging, fines, punishment work and reformative detention in the mission centre. Having unlawfully taken upon itself judicial functions, it was not surprising that the Mission felt the lack of the equivalent of a police force to execute its summonses, guard its 'prisoners,' and augment the authority that it was able to exert by threats of expulsion or excommunication from the Church. This was the case in Baseng mission where gangs are said to have been hired to fulfil the function. "To meet this need, it appears from reports that the services of gangs of Yaunde natives were enlisted. In the evidence in the proceedings against Father Van Dal on charges of assault and deprivation of liberty, we hear of women and girls being 'captured' or 'guarded' by Yaunde men and being held down while they are thrashed by European priests, in one case after the dress of a women of about 35 years of age had been removed. In a report by the District Officer Kumba it is stated that at the sight of a gang of Father Van Dal's Yaunde assistants a crowd of law abiding villagers scented trouble and scattered to their houses"..¹³⁷

Apart from the illegality of their acts, the behaviour of certain European priests of the Mission implied a very definite attempt to impose their religious doctrines upon the native community by methods of intimidation

¹³⁶ BNA-Sd/1931/5 Memorandum Divisional Officer Mamfe to President on "Mbo, Bangwa and Mudane": Infant Betrothal and Sanctity of Chief's wife," 11/6/30

¹³⁷Ibid.

and brutal violence. Such attempts were both repugnant to public opinion on the subject of religious toleration and in contravention of Article 7 of the British Mandate for the Cameroons. The Lieutenant-Governor, Southern Provinces, considered that the activities of at least four of the MILL HILL Mission Fathers were a menace to the peace, order and good government of the Cameroons and was most emphatic in his opinion that Father van Dal should be removed from the country.

Historical Basis of Christian Villages

The conditions under which Christian villages came into being in Southern Cameroon are very clear. Their origin presents no uniform pattern. In some cases, the missionaries accidentally became principal actors of a situation, which they saw could be beneficial to their course and sought to make use of it. Whereas in others they were the principal architects. Whatever the case, Christian villages were not new. The Jesuit Reductions of Paraguay remains one of the most remarkable and stunning creations of Catholic missionary activity. They have contributed more than any other factor to fix the name of Paraguay in history. However, they became the object of the most sincere admiration as well as the bitterest criticism from many quarters.

The founding and the plan of the Reductions cannot be understood and correctly judged except in the light of the colonial and political conditions in the Spanish La Plata territory at the time of the arrival of the Jesuits. The Spanish landed in the territory in 1515. Gradually and in the most inhuman form, the Spanish conquered in bloody and barbaric circumstances. Until 1590, the Spaniards had founded ten cities and forty colonies in Paraguay. Although the Christian villages ended in the most unfortunate way, the initiator of the whole enterprise had the most benevolent of motives. The kings of Spain, with a stake in the evangelisation mission of the Church and having the conversion of the native peoples sincerely at heart, permitted and encouraged missionaries to accompany even the earliest expeditions to La Plata. Churches and parishes were founded in the new colony as soon as possible. Here, as had been the case in other places, the first pioneers of the Faith were members of the one of the mendicant orders, the Franciscans closely followed by the Dominicans. In the beginning, progress was slow and painful. The coming of the members of the Society of Jesus signalled a new

phase and a complete turnabout in missionary fortunes. The enormous territory was divided into three dioceses. As late as 1559, the clergy in the colony numbered in all only twenty secular and regular priests. When the first Bishop of Tucuman, Don Francisco de Victoria, O.P., took charge of his diocese in 1581, he found in the entire diocese only five secular and a few regular priests, not one of whom could speak the language of the Indians. In 1586, the first Jesuits came to Tucuman at his request and in 1587, at the request of the Bishop of Asuncion, Don Alonso Guerra, O.S.F., also to Paraguay.

In view of the reputation attained in Europe by the young order, following the feats accomplished by the legendary Francis Xavier in Eastern India, Anchieta in Brazil and others, it was hoped the Society would bring in its wake new ideas on improving the religious conditions in general as well as on pacifying and converting the numerous wild tribes. A myriad of colleges, seminaries, residences and houses for spiritual retreats founded in rapid succession after 1593 at Santiago del Estero, Asuncion, Cordoba, Buenos Aires, Corrientes, Tarija, Salta, San Miguel de Tucuman, Santa Fe, La Rioja and elsewhere served to attain the first purpose. The second purpose was fulfilled by the ministry among the Indians in the encomiendas and by itinerant missionaries who went out among the tribes still at liberty and covered the vast territory in all directions.

Like the enticing baits employed in the early years of Christendom in Europe, the Royal Ordinance of January 30, 1607, provided that the Indians who were converted and became Christians could not be made serfs and should be exempt from taxation for a period of ten years. With these royal decrees as a basis, the Jesuits began, in explicit understanding with the highest ecclesiastical and civil authorities, commanded by the Government to render efficient aid, to found Reductions. The neglect of the Spanish governors to come to the aid of the missions in their danger was bitterly resented by the Jesuits. Cast upon their own resources, the Jesuits organized, with the king's consent, an Indian militia, equipped with firearms, so that, as early as 1640, they could place a well-disciplined army in the field against the Paulistas and could effectively suppress robbery and pillage. Henceforth, the Reductions continued to form a strong bulwark against the inroads of the Portuguese. The main part of this "Christian Indian State", as the Reductions have been called, were organised on certain guidelines, as we shall see below.

The Reductions of Paraguay are justly called a model of a theocratic commonwealth. Religion ruled all public and private life. The entire community attended Holy Mass and the evening devotions daily. Prayer and religious songs accompanied and encompassed work and recreation alike. Religious instruction was given daily for the children, on several days each week for catechumens and every Sunday for the entire parish. Through the medium of easily sung doctrinal hymns, the doctrines and the principal events of the life of Christ and those of the saints were impressed upon the minds of the people. A sort of religious handbook, bearing the title "On the Proper Use of Time," gave directions concerning the performance of various acts at home and in church in a holy and meritorious manner.

Public religious life in the splendid churches found its expression in an exceedingly brilliant manner, particularly on feast-days. Church music was carefully cultivated, especially under the direction of Italian and German Fathers and its production would have been, according to the testimony of Don Franc Xarque, a credit to any Spanish cathedral. In consequence, the church choirs of the Reductions were frequently invited to the Spanish cities. The reports of the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi, the patronal feasts, the Rogation and penitential processions, the devotion to the saints, particularly to the Blessed Virgin, the representations of the Crib and the Passion, mystery plays, sacramental dances, etc. convey a charming picture of the religious life in the Reductions. Religious societies, especially the Sodalities of the Blessed Virgin, attained a remarkable growth. The reception of the sacraments, after the Reductions had become firmly grounded and a solid body of older Christians had been obtained, was, according to the annual reports and in accordance with ecclesiastical practice of the times, very good. The members of the religious societies received Communion monthly, many of them weekly. The early marriages, strict discipline and surveillance fostered chastity among the natives, which aided the natural increase of the race, ordinarily not very fruitful. Careful control and strict segregation of all objectionable elements did the rest. A number of authentic testimonials of bishops and royal visiting inspectors speak with the greatest admiration of the religious zeal, the devotion, purity of morals, Christian brotherly love and conscientiousness of the Indians, as well as the unshrinking devotion and the edifying lives of the priests.

On April 2, 1767, Charles III of Spain, weak and duped, signed the edict which decreed the exile of the Jesuits from the Spanish possessions in the Jesuit Province of Paraguay, numbered at that time 564 members, 12 colleges, 1 university, 1 novitiate, 3 houses for conducting retreats, 2 residences, 57 Reductions and 113,716 Christian Indians. The farewell from the Indians was agonising. In vain, they pleaded in the most fervent manner to be allowed to keep their Fathers or to be assured that they would return. They never returned. It was this type of Christian villages that the MILL HILL missionaries in Cameroon fancied and sought to re-enact in Cameroon.

The Persecution of Christians

When the missionaries settled in various niches, often very close to the seat of traditional authorities, no one suspected that they were nursing the germs of destruction of the traditional set up. Traditional leaders themselves did not oppose or prevent the missionaries from settling down. Colonial authorities had defeated them militarily and they were in a weak bargaining position. Owing to the fact that they were unable to differentiate between what was colonial and what was missionary, it was normal that they accepted the missionaries without much trouble. Up to the outbreak of the first global armed conflict in 1914, Christian missionaries and most especially Catholic missionaries concentrated mainly on the school projects. Their efforts were directed towards education, which was seen as the key to any meaningful future for the missions to take root. The adults lived their lives unperturbed, leaving the children to imbibe whatever the Whiteman could offer in terms of education. With the post-war years, adult conversions, like a deluge without prior warning, became a reality in great numbers. Like the Christians of the first century in the Roman Empire, the African Christians were hated mostly for their stubbornness and intolerance due to their exclusive devotion to the emergence of new authority figures around the priests and the catechists. Many catechists were seen as usurpers of traditional authority. In the trials of catechists, attempted usurpation of authority was always one of the charges. For example, in the Christian village of Njinikom, the clash between the catechist and Christian leader, Timneng Michael and the Fon of Kom was centred around power roles in the new dispensation. The Fon himself was no longer capable of exercising the authority necessary to ensure

regular tax collection. The Christian community led by ex-German soldiers saw itself as subject to its own set of laws and separate from the larger colonial or Kom society. According to the Divisional Officer, the refusal to pay tax, combined with organized obstruction, proved “that the ex-German soldiers from Fernando Po have not been idle.”¹³⁸ For the local catechists, the more or less permanent presence of European missionaries at the mission station legitimized their authority and prestige on the one hand, while curtailing their independence on the other.

Christianity brought about social instability. The introduction of third force brought about a change in the balance of power. The Fons’ resistance against the church was in the best interest of their kingdom. They rightly perceived Christianity to be a threat to the old social order and hence had no choice but to oppose the movement with all their might. For example, concerning the issue of the runaway wives of the Fons, Plissonneau perhaps saw what he was able to see, with his Western eyes, or what he wanted to see, with his missionary eyes. The Cameroonians concerned, Christians and non-Christians alike, saw the church as “taking” other people’s wives. Christian informants confirm the colonial government’s suspicions that the mission station provided women with a freedom of movement that was considered scandalous and threatening to the old social order.¹³⁹ The final factor which sparked off a major rift between the palaces and the Christian communities was the issue of marriage and women. It became so rife that the colonial authorities had to set in to calm tempers. All over the region, wives and women of marriageable age seeking refuge in the mission became a real problem.

As part of their obligation of their newly found religion, Christians renounced the offering of sacrifices, which was the usual practice of the tribe. Fertility and protection rites were seen as a way of safeguarding food production, which was essential for the continuity of the tribe. Refusal to offer them, it was believed, brought undesirable results of poor harvest, which threatened the very foundations on which tribes were built. This inability of Christians to offer sacrifices themselves and the propagation of the doctrine that it was evil, affronted traditional rulers, who were the custodians of these institutions. For example, during the trial of Catechist

¹³⁸ BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.10.

¹³⁹ Vries p.58

Timneng in Bamenda in 1921, the injunction placed on these fertility rites was considered criminal. "The first report or evidence given against me was that I have spoilt the country and have caused food not to grow because I have banned the medicines"¹⁴⁰ which were being prepared in the houses to make food grow. The Divisional Officer asked me whether I have done so. I told him that it is the law of God that has made the Christians to do away with the primitive fashion and taken in the laws of God. Thou shall not have any God but me."¹⁴¹

The whole episode of Christian villages as applied by the MILL HILL Missions in Southern Cameroons was bound to experience a stillbirth. Several factors made this attempt to create an ideal Christian oasis in the midst of heathen land impossible. The propagators of this enterprise were novices in Africa with no prior experience of creating such a structure. Many of the missionaries who pioneered this experiment were young and new in Africa. The nuclei on which the missionaries hoped to build the Christian villages were already trouble spots in the eyes of the British and traditional rulers. Njinikom and Shisong, long before the arrival of the MILL HILL Missionaries, were already hot spots of conflict. The respective leaders of these communities, such as Paul Tangwa and Michael Timneng, had run into trouble with both colonial and traditional authorities. As we see later, these two leaders, both indigenes, disregarded the precepts of traditional life in the most provocative way. They were seen to be states within states and had usurped powers that would not have been ascribed to a Christian community anywhere.

These pet projects of Christian villages in Shisong, Esu, Njinikom and Baseng saw their obliteration during the life of the very architects who had strongly defended their usefulness. Traditional, colonial and ecclesiastical authorities formed the trilogy of forces that gradually eroded and brought to its logical conclusion, this troubled miniature of ideal Christian communities, meant to have a snowball effect on the neighbouring communities.

¹⁴⁰Medicine here refers to the annual traditional Fertility rites which are practice by many if not all of the ethnic groups in the Grass fields of Cameroon. In Kom, where this became a source of friction and led to the trial of the Timneng, these rites are perform every year beginning from the months of April to July.

¹⁴¹Timneng, Michael Autobiography

Although there were four main concentrations of Christian settlements that came into being under similar circumstances in Kumbo, Njinikom, Esu and Baseng under the auspices of the MILL HILL Missionaries in Southern Cameroons there were other mini versions of such concentrations of Christians in smaller numbers bonded together all over the territory. These concentrations of Christians in these specific localities followed the same pattern. In general, all these settlements - whether on a macro or micro scale - remained true to a definite pattern that seemed almost to have been by design. They all came into being after the First World War, often led by ex-German soldiers, supported by missionaries with the hope that such a safe haven would provide the much-needed conducive environment in which these nascent Christian communities would blossom. The formation of these Christian communities for various reasons attracted other members of the community. The demographic nature of these communities leaned favourably on the side of women; wives of commoners and royals swelled their numbers. Traditional authorities as well as colonial officers saw the missions as a state within a state and sought to dismantle the structures. In less than a half of a century, all these Christian communities disintegrated for various reasons and under very different circumstances. Today, the residue of the Christian villages remains only in the memory of those who lived the experience.



The shaded area of the map was the area entrusted the MILL HILL Missionaries when they arrived Cameroon. It was part of the British territory called Southern Cameroons. British Cameroon was made up of British Southern Cameroons and British Northern Cameroons. Cameroon was one of those territories which as a consequence of the First World War ceased to be under the sovereignty of Germany. As a result and in conformity of article 22 of the League of Nations, the people of the territory were entrusted to Britain and France. Southern Cameroons was divided into four divisions: Mamfe, Bamenda, Kumba and Victoria Divisions. The areas of study fall in three of the four divisions. Southern Cameroons was entrusted to the St. Joseph's missionary societies for foreign Missions known as MILL HILL Missionaries. This society has remained in Cameroon since 1922.

Shisong Christian Village

Introduction

“Eastward from Kumbo wends a road; it crosses the river, Row-Kumbo, runs up the ridge of Tiy-Menkan, skirting Tahyav peak that looms on the left. The visitor after trekking on this road, for forty minutes or so, over bank and bourn; comes to the foot of a parallel spur that juts South-Westwards like a giant buttress from the mountain side. The ridge is bounded west and east by two rills that flow to join Buiy Stream that roars down the jagged gorge to the foot of Mount Tahyav. It is on this aggressive headland called Shisong that the first Catholic Mission station ever, in the grassland area, was built.”¹⁴²

In the 1920s, Shisong village became the centre of strife between Christians and those who had shunned the Whiteman’s religion to remain firmly rooted in the traditions of their fathers. What had begun like a sweet smelling pill, which everyone craving to learn the ways of Whiteman desired to swallow, soon turned out to be an insidious element like the Trojan horse with the hidden potential to rock the foundations of the tribe from within.

In the colonial context, the traditional rulers, left with little or no options, welcomed the missionaries with the hope of benefiting from the prodigy of the Whiteman’s education. This enticing flirt with the Whiteman’s ways was to earn the indigenes more than they had bargained for. Like the biblical Adam and Eve after they had eaten of the fruit of knowledge in the middle of the garden, having tasted of the Whiteman’s religion, these early converts had no option but to cling tightly to it. This was the basis of the dissension between Christians and non-Christians. This dissent was championed by indigenes who had fallen away from the foundations of the tribe into the luring arms of the missionaries and who, like intoxicated zealots, vowed to fight to the very last drop of their blood. Surprisingly, despite the uproar and magnitude of this initial persecution, the storm that had been unleashed with

¹⁴²Fonlon Bernard: *A simple story Simply Told* (1983) CEPER Yaoundé

extreme ferocity by the indigenes, soon receded when the Christian enclave of Shisong acquired almost the status of a state within a state.



Fon Ngah Bifon of Nso

The Nso Fondom became the most accommodating and approachable of all the other Fondoms in the Grass Fields. First, the Christian enclaves of Shisong were established under very different circumstances in relation to other enclaves in the Grass Fields Secondly, the Fon remained very close and supportive to the work of the missionaries especially the school, unlike in

other areas where tension between the Christians and the powers of the Fondom almost became a personal vendetta between the catechist and the Fon. The Nso experience was far from resembling such a scenario. Colonial records, however, provide some hints as to the cloudy background of the conflict between Fon Bifon and Paul Tangwa. After the initial turbulent years of strife and dissension between the Christians and their compatriots, festering tensions soon began giving the early Christian village of Shisong time and fertile conditions to find its roots and flower.

Generally, missionaries were tolerated in the locality mainly because they were seen as an extension of the colonial enterprise. The Germans had demonstrated their military might, subduing the Nso Fondom with extreme brutality. The Fon had no alternative when missionaries knocked at his door with the request for land to settle in 1912. With the expulsion of the Germans together with missionaries, the Fon thought he had seen the last of the Whiteman. Events in Kumbo betrayed the seemingly cordial reception and acceptance of the missionaries by the traditional authorities. Once they rid their land of missionaries, the traditional rulers went a step further to obliterate all vestiges of Christianity in the locality. It is in this context that persecution of Christians became rife. Scorned and rejected by kinfolds, the early converts had no option than to exile themselves. The Christian village of Shisong, which became a sanctuary for these converts, provided the ideal nucleus for Christianity to blossom. Unlike other Christian villages, which bore within themselves the germs of their own destruction, the demise of the Shisong Christian village owed its reasons to contingency from within. The demise of many enclaves had become imperative following the incessant demands of colonial governments and traditional rulers alike. Resisted by early missionaries and converts, the demise of the Shisong Christian enclave was at the whims of later missionaries themselves. In relative terms to all other Christian settlements, Shisong Christian village apparently stood the test of time, surviving the turbulent years and almost achieving its intended purpose if not for the foolhardy and short-sightedness of the missionaries who favoured material gains in terms of land for church material structures over a cohesive Christian community

Nso Early History

Oral accounts date the foundation of the Nso people to 600 years ago when Ngon Nso separated from her two brothers, Mbam and Nchare-Yen, at Rifém around 1394. For a people who had not developed the art and skill of writing and book-keeping, the records of their history for a period of time covering half a millennium is indeed an accomplishment. Only the undeniably indispensable components that represented the very soul of the people have filtered through to modern times through the oral history, albeit tainted with exaggerations of epic memories. However, since 1890, a body of historical information has been compiled by Europeans, missionaries and indigenes who had learnt the Whiteman's craft of writing. The historical evolution of the Nso people since Rifém has three major periods: the separation and emigration of Nso from Rifém to the installation in Kovvifém (1400-1780); from the installation to the quitting of Kovvifém (1780-1820); and the settlement in Kumbo, the present site.¹⁴³

Succession in Kovvifém

It is believed that the Founder of the ethnic group was Ngon Nso, who was a sister to Mbam and Nchare-Yen, all of whom were royal children. Oral history has it that Tamanjo reigned for a very long time. It is possible to date his reign from 1830 to 1880. Shuufaay (Taata) woo Kooñgir, the last of the two Shuufaays appointed by Tamanjo, said in 1958 that whereas Tamanjo reigned for a very long time, his predecessor-Fomikoñ's reign had been average. His reign could be placed between 1800 and 1830.¹⁴⁴ From all indications, the Nso people have lived in the Kumbo settlement for close to two centuries. This chronological prognosis and conjecture is apparently confirmed by the account of Reverend S.W. Koelle who, in 1854, reported his interview with a Nso freed slave called Bunggo, found in Freetown, Sierra Leone and who had been there for 22 years. Bunggo gave his age as 30 years when he was captured in 1825.¹⁴⁵

From all indications and based on evidence from reliable records dating back from the colonial era, it can be said that the Nso were already in their present geographical settlement by 1820, with the capital firmly established in

¹⁴³ Tannla Kishani

¹⁴⁴ Tanla Kishani

Kumbo. True to the phenomenon and characteristics of migration, the Nso, like their neighbours, did not immediately take possession of their present site when they left Kovvifém, but pitched camp in several places long before Kimbo became their tribal possession. Historical approximations dating the initial prospection and reconnaissance for Kimbo to about 1780 sound quite reasonable. It should be noted that the Nkar people, who had settled in the land in question, had to be subdued and displaced to make room for the wandering and warlike Nso people. The departing Nkar people left the place on fire.¹⁴⁶

Like all other large ethnic groups of the Grass Fields that gained prominence and power in the pre-colonial days, Nso gained its numerical strength more by assimilation of neighbouring groups than by natural increase. Whether it was by conquest or wilful submission remains another point of interest. Oral history in lineages and archaeological evidence do reveal a lot about the social organization in Kovvifém. In addition to the Mtaar Nso, the following lineages joined the Nso in Kovvifém: Taañkum (Tsen), Ndzééndzév and Lun. Apart from the Mtaar Nso lineages on the settlement zone, there were other chieftains a few kilometres away who had remained in these sites. For example, Do' Nǵvén, Do' Run, Nǵamansé (Tsénla') and Sañfir among others. Faithful to group dynamics and the desire for security, the military structure of the core group was reorganized several times to cope with the expanding Nso "empire", as wars of conquest brought more land and peoples to its fold during the reigns of Tamanjo and Sehm II.¹⁴⁷

Principles and Structure of Nso Traditional Rule

Nso people's growth and expansion in the Kovvifém settlement are even more difficult to describe in a chronological order than the succession of the kings, whose line is the centre or pivot of reference for writers of Nso history. Yet, through the years, certain discernible characteristics of Nso culture permit us to establish the principle and processes by which the Nso Kingdom grew in Kovvifém before its transfer to Kumbo around 1780. The Nso people grew by sheer mastery of the principles of social dynamics and

¹⁴⁶"Kim bo", literally meaning the place on fire

¹⁴⁷ Daniel Lantum

through survival techniques for co-existence with others. One of them was to concede to other groups certain rights and privileges, while demanding full allegiance and collaboration for peaceful co-existence, collective defence, stability and progress. This mastery was demonstrated in their negotiation with the aborigine and Mtaar Lords, whom the Nso met in Kovvifém and with other aboriginals who preceded the Nso in the suburbs of Kumbo. Nso diplomacy has always been at its best.

Having demonstrated an openness of spirit, many bands of immigrants came from far and near to join the Nso and so swelled their numbers. Of course, the Nso also bought slaves who were war booty from neighbouring tribes (Wir kibam). In the expansions pursuit, they subdued by sheer military might the recalcitrant peoples who would not peacefully negotiate to join them (Wir Kon). After conquest, they achieved integration by extensive toleration, intermarriage, perpetual dialogue and insistence on token gifts of allegiance.¹⁴⁸ To do this successfully, the Nso invented an administrative - system that accommodated all types of peoples under the Paramountcy of Fon Nso, permitting new elements a certain measure of autonomy and cultural identity, while maintaining a super-structure for supervision to ensure royal conformism in matters of security and collective defence. For stability, we could state that the Nso unwritten constitution provides so many checks and balances that the Nso people really did attain a civilization with a lasting cultural equilibrium before the colonial era began in 1906.

The structure for governance could be sketched out as follows: the Fon of Nso was the supreme authority, assisted by a council of seven and he delegated this authority through the afon (little Fons) in the autonomous Fondoms, which he continually watched and kept in check for any excesses and to settle disputes. For those peoples already assimilated, the authority was delegated through a hierarchy of lineage heads (or sub-chiefs) who ranked from Kibayor Shuufaay down through the Faay to the Sheey in a descending order of nobility, authority and responsibility. In the domain of the military, all able adult males were enrolled into the Manjoñ society that again had its own hierarchy. The Mfu' was the highest and most disciplined, followed by the Jwim and then the Njoñ. The Leaders of those Manjoñ societies or Clubs were called Tavnjoñ and the highest of them, called Mfoome, was equated to a General. After him, came the Tavmfu', Lavmnfu',

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Lantum

etc. who were the executive members of Mfu' club. The youth wing of Manjoñ was called Ñgwa'. Here the youth were initiated into war practices during hunting expeditions, as well as taught to be loyal to the Fon by conveying game booty in singing processions to offer to their Fon. Occasionally they would be organized to fetch wood for the Fon and to deliver it solemnly in a procession. The leader was Tavñgwa and the Housekeeper was Lavñgwa. In the area of internal security, there were the Wonle Nto' (Nsheelav) lineages whose duty it was to police the Fondom. They were organized around the Ñweroñ society, a palace cult. Further, to supervise the major entry routes into Nso, some lineage heads were appointed and charged with the responsibility of Atardzéé (father of the road).

In spite of these visible structures, the Nso still resorted to the occult and mystical to create altars at the junctions of major routes entering the capital city Kumbo. These altars of sacrifice were called Ntamer and some lineage heads were assigned to keep them alive and an effective apart from the Atardzéé. Further, every year, the sub-peoples who had been subjugated by military might were expected to pay a token offering to Fon Nso as a mark of continued loyalty and solidarity. This token gift was called Nshwi.

To keep these structures functioning, they established a hierarchical system of justice. There was provision to hear and thrash out minor issues among the lineage members. Problems of more import were addressed to village councils (Nte') and beyond this matters would be referred to the Fon's Council and Taakibu' before the arrival of the modern judicial system with colonialism. The permanent seven members of the Taakibu' council were lineage heads: Ndzééndzév (wo Ku'un), Taañkumtsén, Lun, Ndzééndzévtsen, Yuuwar, Shuv, Waynséeri. In case of default Ñkavikeñ and Ñgañdzén were substitutes.

In the area of hereditary rights, the Nso people, from the very beginning of their Fondom, conceived a simple tripartite pattern of hereditary rights to which every Nso person is entitled by dint of his birth. We can call these the three major clans of Nso people. Although there are differences among them for social identification, there are strong blood ties which mitigate any ambitions to covet others' rights or to successfully usurp and eliminate one another. These clans are the Mtaar Nso, the Duy and the Nsheelav or Wonle Nto'. Every Nso man is born into one of these, learns his role well, without questioning and is collectively identified with his clan.

The Mtaar Nso clan consists of people from the lineages that owned the land before the arrival of Nso mainstream and royal line. They are the aboriginals of Nsoland and assure the maintenance of boundaries. The Duy are distant descendants of the royal line at the level of the fifth pedigree; that is, after the fourth pedigree, the children in the fifth are *ipso facto* the Duy. The Won Nto', the Fon's children of the first to the fourth pedigree, usually associate with the Duy through the social organization called the Ñgiri. Children of the subsidiary "fons" (afon) are usually assimilated into the Duy clan and they participate in the Ñgiri society, which is essentially social but also consultative to the Fon in view of their overwhelming numbers. Some belong to both Ñgiri and Ñweroñ as a special privilege. Some Vibay belong to both for co-ordination. The Wonle Nto' or Nsheelav are derived from a marriage issue between the Duy and the Mtaar Nso. Male children who are issues of a Mtaar Nso Lord and a Duy mother are recruited as Wonle Nto' and trained in the Ñweroñ society to assume the state security and certain public entertainment functions. As retainers, they run the Fon's errands as well as insist on conformity to protocol matters and comportment.

It is established by a system of hereditary rights and privileges, which narrows the selection process since there are sometimes between 50 and 100 wives in the Fon's harem with a brood of hundreds of royal children. Among the harem, a candidate mother who is a potential Fon of Nso, shall have for her father a Mtaar Lord and for her mother a Duy Lady (formally married according to Nso tradition). Exceptions are possible, but well weighted and for the public good. However, they are rare.

The social and cultural structure is quite complex. Checks and balances have been so inbuilt that Nso society was bound to be stable if customary rights and privileges were adequately respected. As this stability had been established and tested through six hundred years, Nso people could be said to have established a civilization much older than that of the United States of America, whose classical democratic constitution was written in July 1776, barely two centuries ago. The Nso were disciplined and hardworking people and they defended their rights and privileges in both the ethnic and national societies.

European experts have recounted that by the end of the 19th century Nso people constituted a powerful force to reckon with in the Western Grass Fields. Estimating the Nso at between 50,000 and 60,000 inhabitants, the German punitive expedition had to approach Nso in two different

companies, one approaching from Babungo and the other through Fouban, with their armament reinforced with machine guns, a canon and 200 soldiers of Bamum origin within German ranks. Nso fell to the Germans in 1906 during the reign of SÈRMBUM (SÈÈM) II, who was eliminated two years later in the Bamenda Fort Station.



Sèrmbum (Sèèm) III, Fon of Nso (Source V.G. Fanzo)

Military Conquest and Subjugation of Nso Fandom

In the 1900s, the German explorers began a systematic and thorough process of military conquest of areas of the Grass Fields. With Bali as a base, the Germans prepared to bring to submission all the Fondoms of the Grass Fields. With careful planning and extreme brutality, the Germans brought the powerful warlike Fondoms of the Grass Fields to their knees. Rebellious Fondoms were humiliated with the most brutal methods to avoid any chief from setting a bad precedence. Often grassland Fons, after witnessing the brutal humiliation of another Fon, tried to placate the Germans by swearing allegiance and surrendering their sovereignty with the hope that softer terms would be negotiated with them. The Germans were not in the grasslands for a picnic or fraternising for its own sake. They were in search of material and human resources. Many Fons of the Grass Fields, after swearing their allegiance to the Germans, soon realised that genuine fraternity with the

Germans was an illusion. Deceived by the early friendly contacts with the Germans, the Fons resisted German demands for human and material resources. The German response was swift, brutal and reckless. The Germans adopted the policy of using one neighbouring tribe to subdue another. This was the case with the conquest of the Nso Fondom.

On February 11, 1902, Pavel filed a report from Banyo giving a description of his journey from Bali to Banyo. Leaving Bali on January 8, with 5 officers, 150 black soldiers and 600 carriers, the expedition received a warm reception at Bambui where the Fon of Kom and the chiefs of Bambili, Bambui and Mejang had gathered to welcome him. Again, the chiefs rejoiced over the Bafut defeat and pledged to supply both labour and provisions to the new station. Bafut appears to have been a nuisance in the region through its frequent predatory raids. The expedition moved on to Bamesing and Babungo where they received similar pledges from the chiefs. On December 15, it reached Kumbo and the Fon of Nso declared his recognition of German sovereignty. The Germans interpreted this immediate declaration of total submission as a consequence of the humiliating defeat of Bafut. That punitive action on Bafut had proven enormously helpful. Passing through Nsungli (Bashungle), the expedition finally arrived at Banyo on December 22. As it passed through the region, the expedition realised the trading and military prowess of Bali-Kumbat. Arriving at Banyo on January 29, they discovered that Captain Nolte had been killed. After major efforts were made to conclude a peace agreement with the new Lamido, because the Lamido who had rebelled was exiled, the expedition finally left Banyo in February. No casualty figures were given about the fighting in Banyo. Nso seemed to be out of trouble¹⁴⁹. Like the other Fondoms, the Nso Fon soon realised that the German demands outweighed what he had bargained for. It seems that the Nso Fon rebelled against the Germans with the hope of getting off lightly from the hook. As in other instances, the German response was swift and brutal.

According to Captain Glauning's report on the expedition to Bansa, two companies conducted the expedition to Nso (Bansa): the Second Company, composed of five European officers, 90 black soldiers and a machine gun

¹⁴⁹ Nkwi, Paul Nchoji (1989), *German presence In the Western Grassfields 1891-1913. A German Colonial Account*, Leiden.

and the Sixth Company, comprising six European officers, 100 black soldiers and one machine gun. It approached Nso from two directions. The Second Company arrived in Kumbo by way of Bamum, while the Sixth Company got to Nso through Babungu. Leaving Bamenda on April 18, the Second Company arrived in Bamum after a 5-day trek. The report states that Njoya, whose father was defeated and killed seven years earlier in a war, was an archenemy of Nso. He gave 200 of his warriors to strengthen the Second Company. With the Bamum re-enforcement, the expedition crossed the Nso frontier and the following day fighting broke out in Fonka and Mundim. On April 29, Kumbo was taken after very little resistance. On that same day, the Sixth Company arrived. Since the enemy had taken refuge in the mountains, several patrols were sent out from April 29 to May 3 to wipe out pockets of resistance. Several Bamum warriors, who had accompanied Njoya and over whom he had no more influence, looted as they hunted for the enemy. Njoya finally returned on May 3 with some of his people. A European patrol accompanied him to the frontier. Since the bulk of the population had taken refuge in the north, the Second and Sixth companies pursued them on May 3. A military post with 46 soldiers was established in Kumbo under the command of Warrant Officer Schmidt and Sergeant Köllner. Since the enemy had taken refuge in the wooded ravines in Kovifem, the Second Company fought there for several hours to dislodge the enemy. The Sixth Company finally arrived at Djottin without fighting and Oku was reported to be calm. When the Germans learnt that the Fon was hiding in a large forest between Bonten and Nso, the Second Company turned back through Nsungli to get ready for an assault. On the night of May 8 to 9, Sub Lt. von Wenkstein was sent to Djottin to tell the Sixth Company to prevent the enemy from fleeing south. On May 9, the forest region was attacked on both sides. Several Nso men and women were taken prisoners. On May 10, a patrol of the Sixth Company was involved in a violent clash where 30 people were killed on the enemy's side. The Fon was wounded, but he succeeded in escaping. The Kumbo military post was harassed several times at night by the Nso militia, which sought to liberate the prisoners. The two companies assembled back in Kumbo on May 20. By May 22, all the military posts were ordered to create an atmosphere for peace negotiations. The Sub-Chiefs of Djottin asked for peace on May 17. Since the Second Company could contain any resistance, the Sixth Company left on May 27 by way of Bamum. On May 28, the first Nso people arrived to ask for peace and hostilities

stopped. From June 4 to 6, patrols were sent out because the negotiations were dragging on too long. The chief councillor of the Fon of Nso only arrived on June 5 to ask for peace. On June 14, Captain Glauning returned to Bamenda after passing through Babessi, Babungo and Babanki-tungo. He was in the Company of Sub. Lt. Eckhard, the medical officer and 20 soldiers. 50 soldiers under the command of Sub. Lt. Wenkstein and Sergeant Köllner stayed back in Kumbo until peace terms were concluded and the road constructed.¹⁵⁰

The German Mission

To settle in Kimbo, the Nso people had to displace those already living there. It was for this reason that the people of Nkar were routed in a battle and displaced to another location eight kilometres away. Shisong, which had been the Nkar Palace, was reserved specially as the Fon of Nso's farm and store. Politically, the Nkar people were also ruled by a Fon whose palace, or Nto', was at Shisong, a village three kilometres from Kimbo Town, which had been the seat of the Catholic Mission since the time of the Germans. On November 9, 1912, six missionaries of the Society of the Sacred Heart of Jesus left their homeland in Germany, commissioned from their motherhouse, Sittard, in Holland. After the customary farewell wishes of the time, which bestowed on the missionaries a sense of heroic charity, the missionaries boarded the Hermy Woermann, the sea vessel that provided the lifeline between the colonialists and missionaries in Cameroon. The voyage took close to three weeks. The first group of Sacred Heart Missionaries included four priests and two brothers; they would lead the way and plant the cross in the hinterlands of the Grass Fields of Cameroon.

On arrival in Douala on November 28, 1912, they met the Pallotine Fathers, the pioneer missionaries of Catholicism in the territory. The Pallotine missionaries embarked on evangelising the coastal areas of East and West Cameroon. The German Pallotine Fathers had established mission stations and schools at Marienberg (1890), Kribi (1891), Edea (1891), Bonjongo (1884), Douala (1898), Batanga (1900), Yaounde (1901), Ikassa

¹⁵⁰ Nkwi, Paul Nchoji (1989), German presence In the Western Grassfields 1891-1913. A German Colonial Account, Leiden.

(1906), Eindiedeln or Sasse and the mainland (1907), Victoria (1908), Ngovayangin (1909), Chang (1910), Ossing (1912) and Deido-Douala (1913).

When the ship docked at Victoria, the Pallotine Father, Albing and some Pallotine Sisters, welcomed the newly arrived Fathers. The new band of missionaries met Bishop Henri Vieter, who had been the Vicar Apostolic of the Cameroons since 1905. Among the new arrivals was Father Lennartz, an old missionary who had been in the Congo and Father Johann Emontz, who was on his first tour to West Africa. Following the newly traced and secured paths linking the Grass Fields to the coast, the Sacred Heart Missionaries prepared to embark on a journey to a land in which they had no first-hand experience. They had only the memories of the early German explorers, who had canvassed the Grass Fields, subdued the natives, made peace and established posts to safeguard the flow of resources towards the coast. Even with these safety measures, a journey of a small band of missionaries in those days was still fraught with uncertainties and dangers.

A journey from the coastal areas of Douala up to the outpost of Kumbo was no mean task. It took even the most agile and swift of indigenes, accustomed to the terrain, several days, sometimes weeks. How were these missionaries to make their way to land they had only heard of or seen on colonial maps? Providence had in store for them in Doula an indigene from the Grass Fields, who had established links with the Nso people by marriage. He was still a catechumen and was regarded as the best possible asset the new missionaries could afford. The Vicar remembered the catechumen taking part in the doctrine classes at the Catholic Mission in Douala. Drawing from his fidelity to the doctrine classes, he was judged to have shown signs of great faith. He was Peter Wamey, a former civil servant in the German Administration. He was born in Babungo in Ndop in the Grass Fields. He had previously acted as an interpreter in Bamenda and had learnt of the Catholic religion while journeying to Yaoundé, Kribi and Douala with his master, the Divisional Officer. Owing to the absence of any Catholic mission in the Grass Fields, Wamey had further showed signs of faith by relocating to the littoral, taking all the pains necessary to achieve a lifetime ambition of becoming Christian. This was the reason for his presence in Douala and he was anxiously waiting for the day of his baptism after which he was to return to his homeland. The hopes of the missionaries making any headway inland rested on the shoulders of this man.

At the Vicar's invitation, he was given an assignment he did not expect. He was to be a companion of the newly arrived missionaries to Bamenda. Besides assuming the task of companion, he was to act as an interpreter. His job in the weeks ahead would go beyond that of a neutral interpreter; he would act as a sympathetic broker in negotiations with traditional rulers of the Grass Fields to secure land and early converts. Peter Wamey felt most honoured by this suggestion, but the thought of his baptism preoccupied him. He wanted to have something in common with and to be in communion with, his newly found companions. He wanted to leave Doula baptised as a Christian. Like baptism in danger of death, Peter Wamey and his wife Elisabeth Yaadily were baptised the following day. Providence seems to have put things in their proper order. Being a fervent catechumen with a wife from the Nso Fandom gave him a vantage position, the right prerequisite to lay his claim and make a foothold in the two arenas that were essential for his mission. He was now a Christian and a son-in-law to the people to whom he was to introduce his new visitors.

These two attributes gave him considerable advantage in his new assignment.



Elisabeth Yaadij, The first Nso Person to be baptised. She was baptised in 1912.

Peter Wamey and his wife received baptism and first Holy Communion on December 15, 1912. Empowered and encouraged by his newfound status, Wamey was ready for the long trek to Bamenda. It was in the company of this new Christian couple that Fathers Joseph Lennartz and Johann Emontz made their maiden journey to the Grass Fields. Father Lennartz, the Superior and Father Emontz had arranged to take the lead, leaving the other two Fathers and two Brothers for some days in Douala. The advance party met on the beach of the Wouri River the afternoon of December 16, 1912. Peter Wamey stood there with his wife, his load and some other boys who had volunteered to be part of this expedition. They crossed the river by ferry and the next part of the journey to Nkongsamba, about 200 kilometres, was by train. At Nkongsamba, the Fathers arranged for about 40 carriers. Before them stood the rugged terrain and mosquito-infested forests that would usher them into the friendly grasslands and rivers. It took them a week to reach Bamenda after trekking over the hills of Melong, Dschang, Babaju and Santa.



The German Sacred Heart Missionaries in Cameroon (1913). The missionaries benefited enormously from the presence of their civil German compatriots on the ground.

The Sacred Heart Missionaries benefitted enormously from the magnanimity of the German colonial officers. The German colonial officers had already subjugated the warring and rebellious tribes and created newly blazed trails, including railways. "More recent years have seen the last of the unknown territories - Australia and the interior of Africa - yield to the relentless assaults of modern exploration. These years have also seen the emissaries of the Church follow the newly blazed trails into the new lands. In all the vast reaches of the Pacific it would now be difficult to find an island remote enough to have escaped the vigilance and the energy of our missionaries."¹⁵¹ In addition to this infrastructural work, they gave the missionaries advice and protection. The missionaries benefitted enormously from the presence of their civil German compatriots on the ground. Bamenda was a German military station because of its strategic position in the grasslands. The large redbrick fort was used only for military offices and stores. The Germans were impressed by the human resources they saw in the Grass Fields. The establishment of the fort was for colonial officers and missionaries alike. For example, in his report to the Colonial Bureau of the German Foreign Office, Zingraff stressed the importance of developing the Western Grass Fields as a market centre for German trade and export goods. For him, the region provided excellent ground for the recruitment of labour and soldiers. The region could replace Monrovia, Ghana and Togo in terms of labour supply. He was convinced also that Bali should have a station that could protect European traders and missionaries, helping to keep the routes safe for caravans as well as to ensure justice among the natives.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹Benedict XV. *Maximum Illud*: Apostolic Letter on the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World. 30 November 1919. Translated by Thomas J. M. Burke, S.J. Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Office.no.5

¹⁵² Chilver, Elizabeth M., (1963), *Native Administration in the West Central Cameroons*, 1920-1954



Dr. Eugene Alfred Zintgraff: The first German explorer with a well-conceived plan to travel into the interior and acquire large expanse of land for German. He subdued the Fondoms of the Grass Fields through blood pacts, intrigue and in some cases sheer brutal conquest of rebellious and unyielding tribes.

They paid a visit to the District Officer, who welcomed the missionaries and encouraged them to proceed to Nso, 107 kilometres to the North, where the Christians' religion would have a chance to grow and develop. Bansa had a great number of inhabitants with one language. They were, like other Africans, deeply, naturally religious. This assumption contained some truth. Nso was the largest tribe in the Grass Fields with one language, but all other tribes were equally very religious.

The Western Grass Fields were by West African standards densely populated. It had over 50 ethnic units whose elements of identification were both cultural and linguistic. Racially identical, with slight variations, these independent units are said to have entered the region over different periods in time and through different paths. In 1906, the population of the then Bamenda Bezirk was put at 154 000. Steiner describes the region as far more populated than the south and relatively healthy, if not completely free from fever (malaria), thanks to its height of 1300 m. The population of Bali-Nyonga and its vassal villages, was put at 70 000 and Bali-Nyonga itself was estimated at 12 000 inhabitants. The other groups were given rough population figures (Köm – 20 000, Nso - 50 000, Oku - 6 000, Nsungli-5 000, etc.). Such figures were not based on any objective house-to-house head count. The Germans took down what they were told.¹⁵³ Although numerical advantage was important in any mass evangelisation through an established medium of communication, numerical considerations do not explain everything. Bamenda was very close to Bali. Bali had already been secured by the Basel Missions. If the government wanted its civilising mission through missions to become a reality, it was imperative that the new Catholic organisation should go further afield.

The Fathers left Bamenda and continued their march, passing through Babanki Tungo, Bamessing to Bamunka. At Babungo, Peter Wamey was glad to be back in his homeland with his new wife from Nso and so were his people. Peter Wamey took the opportunity to tell the Fon of his village that missionaries were not like the German soldiers whom they had met so often and who had maltreated the people. He further pointed out that these religious men had not come to enrich themselves with the people's money and property, but to preach the Christian religion, open churches, educate children in schools, help the sick and make the people happier, wiser, healthier and useful to other people.

In the presence of such august visitors of rare pedigree and elated by such close rapport, which exhibited such noble sentiments of goodwill, the Fons could not resist asking the missionaries to stay. They attempted to entice the missionaries to stay, promising to make available to them all that their skill and environment could provide: land, food and palm wine. In the face of such unbounded generosity, the missionaries must have found it very

¹⁵³Lafon, Joseph (1988) A history of the Catholic Church in Kumbo Diocese 1912-1988

painful to turn down such an offer that came from the heart. The missionaries were guided by pragmatic concerns. The criteria for selecting a location went far beyond basic human needs of land, food and palm wine. They wanted to halt the advance of Islam and to identify an ethnic group populous enough to act as a launching pad for the evangelisation of the area. All they could do was a promise to return on a later date.

Sacred Heart Missionaries Niche In Shisong

The last few days of the journey were the most mind numbing. Ndog Plain – a flat area of fertile land over 30 kilometres in length, encompassing Baba I and Babessi and then stretching to the mountains (Bam Nka) and to Tabeso – remained the last of the terrain to be crossed. On December 13, 1912, the first group of missionaries, tired, exhausted and sunburnt, arrived at Shisong. It was a journey fraught with dangers and uncertainties. Unlike some missionaries who literally spent the first days in unknown localities in open air, they were given a rest house at Kuy Nto' Nshelay, adjacent to the Fon's palace. His Royal Highness Nga Bifon I gladly received them. These missionaries were now 6 000 feet above sea level and more than 400 kilometres from the coast, in a cool climate where the temperature at night sometimes dropped to between 10 and 7 degrees centigrade and during the day rose to 30 degrees centigrade. Kumbo presented some seasonal climatic extremes, but the missionaries must certainly have been pleased to find a cool, refreshing climate, a teeming population, a welcoming Fon and abundant fertile land where European nutritional necessities such as potatoes could thrive. Their compatriots in the coastal lands had to struggle every day with the hazards of the warm, equatorial, mosquito-infested coastal climate.

Official Reception of the Missionaries

According to other sources the German Sacred Heart Fathers arrived Cameroon on November 30, 1912 “ Les prêtres du Sacré-Coeur Allemands sont arrivés au Cameroun le 30 novembre 1912 et se sont implantés à Kumbo le 31 décembre de la même année. Mais ils considéreront la date du 1er janvier 1913 comme celle du début de la mission scj au Cameroun. De la première vague se trouvent les Pères Gerahd Lennartz (qui sera nommé préfet apostolique en mai 1914), Robert Mönnersdörfer, Johann Emonts et

les Frères August Männersdörfer, Felix Lennartz et Crispin Göetz. Se joindront à eux en mai 1913, les Pères Konrad Schuster, Wilhelm Zicke et Wilhelm Bintener ainsi que les Frères Bonaventura Weber, Gabriel Rommerskirchen, Domminikus Küpper et Lazarus Schreiber, quatre parmi eux iront à Ossing, un poste cédé aux scj par les Pallottins. En mai 1914 arriveront les Frères Fridolin Schreiber, Vinzenz Groszinski et les Pères Lorenz Foxius et Franciscus Baumeiter avec cinq Soeurs de la Divine Providence de Münster dont nous donneront les noms plus loin.¹⁵⁴

The German Sacred Heart Missionaries arrived Cameroon on November 30, 1912 and settled in Kumbo on December 31, of the same year. But the January 1, 1913 is considered as the date for the foundation of the mission as well as the beginning of the mission of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Cameroon. Father Gerahd Lennartz (who later was named the Prefect Apostolic in May 1914,) Robert Männersdörfer, Johann Emonts and Brothers August Männersdörfer, Felix Lennartz et Crispin Göetz. They were later joined in Mai, 1913, by Fathers Konrad Schuster, Wilhelm Zicke and Wilhelm Bintener as well as Brothers Bonaventura Weber and Gabriel Rommerskirchen

The first meeting with Nga' Bifon I, his sub chiefs and the great councillor (Vibaay) took place in the rest house. The missionaries arrived on a Waylun¹⁵⁵ and met the Fon and his closest collaborators the following day

¹⁵⁴ Méthodes d'évangélisation des dehonienens Allemands au Cameroun (1912-1915) The German Sacred Heart Missionaries arrived in Cameroon on the November 30, 1912 and settled at Kumbo on December 31 of the same year. But they consider January 1, 1913 as the date of the foundation of the mission of the sacred Heart of Jesus Missionaries in Cameroon. Among the first group were Father Gerahd Lennartz (who was later appointed as the Prefect Apostolic in May 1914) Robert Männersdörfer, Johann Emonts and Brothers August Männersdörfer, Felix Lennartz and Crispin Göetz. They were later joined in May 1913 by Fathers Konrad Schuster, Wilhelm Zicke and Wilhelm Bintener as well as Brothers Bonaventura Weber, Gabriel Rommerskirchen, Domminikus Küpper and Lazarus Schreiber, Four of them went to Ossing, a mission which had been ceded to the Sacred Heart Missionaries by the Pallotines. In May 1914 Brothers Fridolin Schreiber, Vinzenz Groszinski and Fathers Lorenz Foxius et Franciscus Baumeiter arrived with five sisters of the Divine Providence of Münster whose name we will give later. (Author's translation)

¹⁵⁵ Ibid

Ntangrin.¹⁵⁶ After exchanging kind greetings in the Nso language, the Fon was well disposed towards them from the beginning. The missionaries demonstrated to the Fon what they could potentially do to put Nsoland on the path of modernity. While echoing the familiar bait of the time, the missionaries began from the mundane aspects, hoping to lure the Fon and his people. “And your town will be big, because all other tribes will send their children here to learn book.”¹⁵⁷ The promise of education was used or employed as bait. If the Fon and his people were not enticed by a foreign god, known only to the missionaries, the promise of education and the development of their town might entice them. The missionaries corrected a misconception for the Fon, namely, that they were soldiers in disguise and would ask for taxes or collect money from people. As a sign of acceptance and communion, the missionaries drank the Fon’s wine, which was presented to them. The Fon offered gifts of chickens, bananas, eggs and baskets of corn flour to his august guests who had come to open the treasures of the Whiteman to his people.

For the duration of the meeting, Peter Wamey acted as an interpreter. The Missionaries explained to him why they had come all the way to Nsoland. He added that only a few Nso people had been received into the Christian religion. The priests then asked for permission to stay with his people and work among them, as friends, to help them in their spiritual and temporal needs. They had come with a fraternal, benevolent message from the God who had sent them to proclaim his love to all people. Unlike the others that had come before them, their mission excluded forced labour and the extortion of taxes. “The Fon stood up and thanked us for coming and said that we could stay and that his big people would send their children to school.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Names of Traditional days of the Nso People.

¹⁵⁷ Desmond Forristal(1990) *The Second Burial of Bishop Shanahan*, VERITAS Publication.

¹⁵⁸Ibid



The Sacred Heart Church in Shisong, built by Father Scully and inaugurated on Sunday, June 14, 1931. It was declared by the West Cameroon Government in 1967(Photography by Father Leo Onderwater)

Settlement in Shisong

The Fon gave the Fathers and Brothers a house in Tankum for the interim. True to his magnanimous heart, the Fon decided to give the missionaries a chance to choose their future abode. The Fathers went out in search of land, or a good plot, to present to the Fon for formal allocation. Certain conditions had to be met. It had to be: "... near the people, with plenty of land for farming and keeping of cows etc. ...; good land too, so that the missionaries could show by their industry that the road to heaven lies through hard work on earth."¹⁵⁹

The missionaries made a reconnaissance mission twenty-five minutes south of Kimbo Town. Shisong offered the ideal environment. The Fon generously offered them the land and promised that his people would help in building houses for them. They eventually built five houses, including the church, with raffia sticks - the walls covered with mud (clay) and the roofs thatched with grass. The Fon and his great councillors gave what they could

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

afford without reservation. Labourers and carriers provided labour generously. Once the school was functional, the same authorities went out in search of children to become the first to master the art of reading and writing in the Grass Fields.

The land offered to the missionaries was priceless to the Fon; Shisong was a sacred place. The people of Nkar had had their Fon's palace in Shisong before the warring Nso tribe drove them to their present site. The storehouse of the Fon of Nso was built in Shisong. It was directly behind the Fon's palace in Kimbo and was a possible exit for the Fon in an emergency. Of all places, excluding the palace itself, this would have been the least likely to be given to foreigners, especially Germans who had brought the Nso tribe to their knees with cruelty. In addition, it was surrounded by kola nut trees. The produce of these trees and their export to Nigeria, gave the people access to wealth and prosperity. It was a strategic place from every point of view and it was given to the missionaries. What a telling gesture.

On January 9, 1913, the Fathers, who had been living temporarily near the Fon's palace, moved to Shisong. Shortly before this, the Fon had made an important announcement in the market, inviting the people who had dug the road from Babessi to Bafem the previous year to build the Fathers' house in Shisong while people in Kimbo were to continue the road from Bafem to Kishong.”¹⁶⁰ The people turned out in their hundreds. The houses were constructed with bamboo and mudded within a few days. Five houses in all were built. According to the testimony of Father Emontz, “After many days of hard labour, a church house was completed, a school and a boarding house for school children.” The mission was dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Father Emontz wrote, “We are happy to have found a tribe of at least 30 to 40 thousand people, who speak the same language and the centre for many populous tribes around. This must be head station for Adamawa mission. And Nso is also useful as a stepping stone into the big tribes of the north.”¹⁶¹

He made contacts with the population of Wum and Bababaji. He hoped one day to open a mission station in Foumban, the capital of Bamum country, which had a burgeoning population of some 80 000 people. The capital city of Bamum, Foumban had 20 000 people and had become a

¹⁶⁰ J. Emonts *Ins Steppen und Bergland Inner Kameruns*, Aachen Chapter 1

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*

stronghold of Islam. Father Lennartz was keen to embark on this project as soon as possible. To his dismay, the Sultan of Foumban refused to grant the required permission to open a mission station in Foumban. “Let Pere Lennartz de founder une mission centrale à Foumban. Mais le sultan Njoya, tout en leur reservant un accueil cordial refusa L’autorisation demandée.”¹⁶²

Unable to obtain permission, the Missionaries turned their attention elsewhere. Father Johann Emontz made inroads into unexplored territory in the Nsogli tribe and Noni area, reaching as far as Bum, Ndu, Mbot, Tabenken, Chup, Nchanti, Kunge, Nkor and Djottin. His immediate assistant was Dschari, from Nsungli tribe, formally the boy of a German official who had taken him to Douala on his way home. There Dschari remained as a catechumen, attending school until he met the missionaries and became Father Emontz’s boy and interpreter. Later on, he became a Catechist of the Church and thought in Tabeken.

Like other missionaries of the time, the Sacred Heart Missionaries remained faithful to the school project, recruiting school children from the neighbouring tribes. Shisong became a centre, teeming with more than one hundred school children from Oku, Djottin, Babji, Wum, Nsungli, Babessi, Baba I and Babungo. The missionaries’ dedication to education was pragmatic. The school was a means to prepare catechists. The school project, therefore, was the launching pad or the springboard of evangelisation. In the new dispensation, this option seemed plausible.

“ Comme tous les missionnaires de l’époque, les Prêtres du Sacré-Coeur Allemands avaient deux visées intimement liées: l’évangélisation et la “civilisation “. A leurs yeux, c’était en amenant les indigènes à se cultiver aux habitudes occidentales que ceux-ci pouvaient mieux assimiler la Bonne Nouvelle. La première approche était de rencontrer les chefs et de leur obtenir les terrains. Le terrain acquis, avec l’aide de la population, ils bâtissaient la chapelle, l’école et la case d’habitation si le missionnaire devait y résider. Le Père Zicke écrit: Pour cela, il est méritoire que le labeur du missionnaire qui est plus que d’éclairer leurs âmes (des indigènes), en leur enseignant le chemin qui mène à Dieu, leur illumine peu à peu l’intelligence, développe leurs facultés mentales vers la culture et la civilisation. Le Père

¹⁶²T. Fondjo, album des Ans e L’église Catholic au Cameroon, 1981-1966 p.11

Ducamp ajoute: Notre apostolat commencera par l'école et la culture générale servira de véhicule à la science de Dieu. »¹⁶³

German Catholic School In Shisong

« Les missionnaires voyaient en l'école un moyen incontournable pour l'évangélisation. Pouvait-il en être autrement puisque c'est là qu'on pouvait s'initier à l'allemand et pouvoir communiquer avec eux ? L'école était aussi pour les populations un palliatif pour le problème de la jeunesse masculine auquel elles faisaient face. Quittant leur famille entre quatre et six ans, les garçons habitaient entre eux en un lieu à eux réservé, s'initiant à la chasse et aux activités réservées aux hommes: construction des cases, débroussaille, l'art de faire la guerre pour défendre le village en cas d'attaque... Ils devraient certainement s'ennuyer dans cette vie routinière et sans doute faite de chicanes et de brimades des aînés. Il ne faut pas s'étonner qu'ils aient été les premiers à fréquenter l'école contrairement aux filles qui étaient bien occupées par les travaux champêtres et ménagers en attendant l'âge du mariage. L'école ne permettait pas seulement de connaître la langue allemande, mais d'acquérir aussi les modes européennes et d'être à mesure de lire et comprendre le catéchisme et la Parole de Dieu »¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ DIEZ A., *El hombre que dijo si*. Guillermo Zicke cuenta su vida, Grafica Dehon, Madrid 1996, P. 99. Like all Missionaries of the time, the German Sacred Heart Fathers had two common objectives : Evangelisation and civilisation. In their opinion, it was by making the indigenes acquire western habits that they could better understand the Good News. The first approach was to meet the chiefs and obtain land from them. On the acquired land and with the help of the population they built the chapel, the school, and the home the missionaries were to stay. Father Zicke writes: For that, it is worth that the labour of the missionary which is more than winning their souls (of the indigenes) by teaching them the path that leads to God, to enlighten little by little their intelligence, develop their mental faculties towards a culture and civilisation. Father Decamp adds : Our apostolate will begin with the school and general knowledge will serve as a means to the science of God. (Author's translation)

¹⁶⁴ DIEZ A., *El hombre que dijo si*. Guillermo Zicke cuenta su vida, Grafica Dehon, Madrid 1996, P. 99 The missionaries saw the school as an indispensable tool for evangelisation. Could it have been otherwise as it was it that one could become used to the Germans and be able to communicate with them? To the local population, the school also

Less than a year after the Fathers had settled in Shisong, there were visible signs of progress. In such a short time, they had accomplished so much. The school programme had taken shape. Morning and evening prayers were said in common. Every morning at six o'clock, the angelus was said, followed by Holy Mass. Classes, which began at 8 o'clock were given in the Lamnso and German language. The process of translating the catechism into Lamnso was set in motion. This initial effort ensured an easier take-off. Reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, singing and religious instruction were the main subjects taught. Afternoons were set aside for agriculture, gardening, manual arts and games.

“Les élèves étaient internés à la mission (Kumbo, Ossing, Bekom...) et prenaient part aux activités spirituelles, intellectuelles et manuelles. Ils assistaient à la messe de 6h 15 chaque matin avant de prendre le petit déjeuner à 8 heures. Puis, c'était la gymnastique avant le début des cours qui consistait à apprendre à lire, à écrire, à compter et à dactylographier. La première heure selon le Père Emonts était dédiée à la catéchèse et à l'histoire biblique suivies d'une hymne de l'Eglise. Le Père Zicke est ébloui par la rapidité qu'avaient ces petits Noirs d'assimiler les règles de grammaire. A Ossing où il évangélisait, les enfants apprenaient en même temps l'allemand et l'anglais et selon son témoignage, en moins de deux ans, les élèves échangeaient de correspondances avec les enfants européens de leur âge dans les deux langues. La même expérience est faite à Kumbo par le Père Emonts qui arrive à la conclusion: Trois années d'expérience ont prouvé que les garçons noirs sont aussi intelligents que n'importe quel garçon blanc. Ce qu'il leur faut, c'est l'opportunité pour apprendre et un maître qui ne perd pas patience et courage pendant le premier semestre de la participation des élèves

provided a solution to the problems faced by young males. Leaving their families between the ages of four and six, the boys lived together at a place reserved only for them where they were introduced to hunting and other activities reserved for men: construction of huts, clearing, the art of warfare needed for the defence of the village in case of an attack... certainly such monotonous life style created on the whims and caprices of the elders, had to be boring to them. It is therefore not surprising that they were to attend school, as opposed to the girls who were well occupied by farm work and household duties while waiting the age for marriage. The school offered not only the opportunity to learn the German language, but to acquire European fashion and to be able to read and understand the catechism and the scriptures. (Author's translation)

aux cours. Le changement de la vie sauvage et libre à la régularité et l'ordre est très difficile pour nos garçons d'Afrique, mais une fois qu'ils s'habituent à la vie de la mission, ils s'adaptent merveilleusement bien".¹⁶⁵

With the tenacity and a penchant for exactness characteristics of the Germans, Father Emontz introduced order, punctuality and hygiene – strange ideas to the children, who had grown up rather freely and carelessly in their villages. The Christian virtues and the Christian way of life, especially friendliness towards all people regardless of tribe, self-control, justice and purity, were among the chief points of the doctrine that helped shape their characters and conduct. On Saturdays, the children were permitted to return to their villages. "Le vendredi soir, les enfants se rendaient dans leur village pour chercher des vivres et du bois pour la semaine et revenaient soit le samedi soir ou le dimanche matin pour prendre part à la célébration eucharistique"¹⁶⁶. At Easter and Christmas, all went home to spend their holidays with their parents and relatives.

The missionaries studied Lamnso and Nso customs as well as those of the nearby villages like Tabenken and Babessi. These missionaries were able

¹⁶⁵ EMONTS, J., Art. cit., 104. The pupils were lodged and fed at the mission (Kumbo, Ossing, Bekom...) and participated in spiritual, intellectual and manual activities. They attended mass at a quarter past six every morning before taking breakfast at eight O'clock. Then came gymnastics before the start of the lessons which consisted in learning how to read, to write, to count and to type. According to Father Emonts, the first hour was dedicated to catechism work and Bible History followed by a church hymn. Father Zicke was surprised by the speed at which these little blacks acquired the rules of grammar. At Ossing where was evangelising, the children were learning German and English simultaneously and according to his testimony, the pupils were able in less than two years to exchange letters with their European age mates in two languages. Father Emonts had the same experience in Kumbo and arrived at this conclusion: Three years of experience have proven that black boys are as intelligent as any white boy. What they need is the opportunity to learn and a teacher who does not lose patience and courage during the first semester of the pupil's attendance of classes. The change from a wild and free life to regularity and order is very difficult for our African boys but once they get used to the life at the mission they adapt extremely well"

¹⁶⁶ Ibid On Friday evenings, the children went to their villages to get foodstuff and firewood for the week and came back either on Saturday evening or Sunday morning in order to take part in the celebration of the Eucharist.

in a short space of time to compile a Lamnso-German dictionary and grammar, a Lamnso catechism, a hymn book and a bible history. “Certainement, les missionnaires se faisaient traduire par les premiers élèves qui assimilaient vite la langue allemande ou par des chrétiens comme Peter Wamey et sa femme qui les avaient accompagnés de Douala à Kumbo. Progressivement, ils traduisaient le catéchisme en langue Banso pour Kumbo. Le Père Emonts s’en est passionné. Les derniers jours à Kumbo, le Père Männedörfer se servira de la machine regalée au Père Schuster par les médecins anglais qu’il avait aidés durant la guerre pour saisir ce catéchisme du Père Emonts en Banso”¹⁶⁷

This was in 1913. In retrospect regarding the work of this missionary within so short a time, it can rightly be said that, “It must, therefore, seem ironic that there are several priests today who are aloof from the people, with no elementary knowledge of their customs and usages. How can such persons ever carry out an effective evangelisation of the area when they are so far from the people? It is not easy to recount the previous activities of such priests on the spiritual, economic and social domains.”¹⁶⁸ The German missionaries’ desire to study the language and customs of the people was in line with the prevailing policy guidelines. Pope Benedict XV, in 1919, after the expulsion of the Germans from Cameroon, recommended this policy in his encyclical *Maximum Illud*:

“Among the attainments necessary for the life of a missionary, a place of paramount importance must obviously be granted to the language of the people to whose salvation he will devote himself. He should not be content with a smattering of the language, but should be able to speak it readily and competently. For in this respect he is under an obligation to all those he deals with, the learned and the ignorant alike and he will soon realize the advantage

¹⁶⁷ Ibid Certainly the missionaries used for the purposes of translation the first pupils who were able to acquire the German language fast enough or some Christians such as Peter Wame and his wife who accompanied them from Douala to Kumbo. Progressively, the translated the catechism into the Banso language for Kumbo. Father Emonts was quite excited about that. During his last days in Kumbo, Father Männedörfer used the machine offered to Father Schuster by the English doctors he had helped during the war to print Father Emont’s catechism in Banso. (Author’s translation)

¹⁶⁸ Joseph Lafon (1988) *A History of the Catholic Church in Kumbo Diocese (1912-1988)*

a command of their language gives him in the task of winning the confidence of the populace. If he is earnest about his work, he will be particularly reluctant to delegate the explanation of Christian doctrine to his catechists. He will insist upon reserving this duty to himself. Since he has been sent to the missions for no other purpose, after all, than to preach the gospel, he will even come to look on these instruction periods as the most important part of his work. There will also be occasions when, in his position as representative and interpreter of our holy Faith, he will have to associate with the dignitaries of the district. Or he may be invited to appear at scholarly gatherings. How will he maintain his dignity under these circumstances if he cannot make himself understood because he does not know the language?"¹⁶⁹

The Missionaries were keen to begin on all fronts. While the school project was important, it was equally important to address the needs and conversion of adults from the beginning. For this reason the catechumenate was established. Catechumens had to undergo a two to three year course of instruction before they were baptized. Christians and catechumens were forbidden to take part in pagan juju dances and drinking parties, to partake in pagan forms of sacrifice and pagan customs, such as wearing amulets, or to believe in witchcraft. Nor was pagan medicine tolerated. Young people were given opportunities on the mission to organize and dance in order to entertain themselves. There were sports, games, competitions, musical performances, plays and meetings of Chong. In a society with its own customs of days of rest and respect for ancestors and gods of the village, the missionaries were careful to introduce from the onset the Christian culture of Sunday as a day of rest. That day was devoted to God and his worship. There was usually a sung mass, with the singing accompanied by the harmonium.

“Les célébrations eucharistiques dominicales exerçaient un attrait chez les adultes. La messe se disait en latin et les chants grégoriens fascinaient par leur mélodie. Le Père Zicke témoigne: Là (à la célébration eucharistique), se retrouvaient les anciens du peuple qui, en entendant chanter les enfants de leur tribu les mélodies de notre grégorien, la messe des anges et quelques simples chants dans leur langue natale, cela leur paraissait chose d’un autre monde... Tant il est ainsi que même les plus invétérés de leurs coutumes païennes, viennent avec plaisir pour être présents aux offices de notre Sainte

¹⁶⁹Benedict XV op. cit. no. 24

Mère l'Église. Il fallait voir avec quel orgueil les anciens admiraient les enfants de leur peuplade en les écoutant chanter des choses si étranges qu'ils n'avaient pas encore entendues jusque-là. Aussi, les enfants aimaient le dimanche. Écoutons le Père Emonts à ce sujet. Les plus petits attendaient impatiemment ce jour. Qu'attentivement ils regardaient le prêtre à l'autel et comme ils chantaient les belles hymnes de l'Église ! Après la messe, ils s'engageaient dans les divers jeux, faisaient une excursion à pied ou rendaient visite aux parents et connaissances. Ils aimaient aussi jouer leurs instruments traditionnels ou danser au rythme des tam-tams et des tambours. ”¹⁷⁰

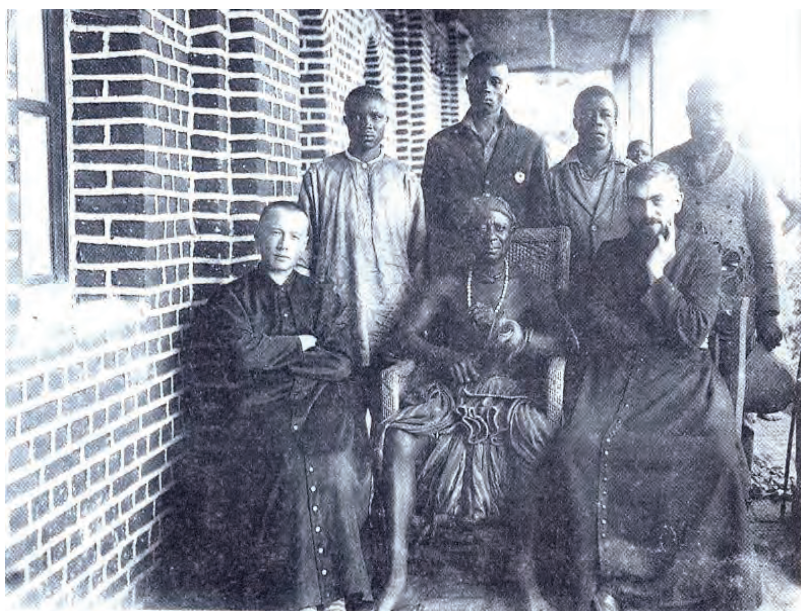
First Fridays of the month devotion were celebrated with great solemnity. As the number of catechumens grew, hopes of a new chapel in Kumbo became prevalent. The number of indigenes who became Christians increased considerably. Many baptized in the coastal region returned to Kumbo to swell the numbers of Christians. Two more schools were opened, one at Babessi and one at Ntang. Later schools were opened in Sov, Oku, Mbot, Tabenken and Babanki Tungo. A new church house was needed to accommodate the more than 200 pupils and the increasing number of catechumens, whose ranks were swelled by Christians returning from Douala. There was need for more schools buildings at Shisong. The transfer of western technology to Africa through missionary endeavour began to manifest itself as bricks and tiles were made in the kiln. Firewood was carried

¹⁷⁰ Méthodes d'évangélisation des dehoniens Allemands au Cameroun (1912-1915) The Sunday Eucharistic celebrations were an attraction to the adults. The mass was celebrated in Latin and the Gregorian chants were fascinating by their melody. Father Zicke testifies: There (at the Eucharistic celebrations) the elders of the people found themselves listening to the children of the tribe sing our Gregorian melodies, the mass of the angels and some simple songs in their mother tongue was a thing of another world... it is such that even the most (inflexible) staunch supporters of their pagan customs come with pleasure to be present at the services of our holy mother, the church. One needed to see the pride with which they admired their own children sing strange things which had not heard until that moment' Also the children liked Sundays. Let us listen to Father Emonts on this topic : the very little ones waited impatiently for this day. How they looked at the altar with much attention and how they sang the church hymns. After the mass they got involved in various games, made excursions on foot or paid visits to relations and acquaintances. They equally liked to play their traditional instruments or to dance to the rhythm of the drums. (Author's translation)

in great quantities. Women and children carried stones and water. It was time for the missionaries to show what they were made of and what missions could bring besides preaching the Word.

A completely new culture began to manifest itself. Shey-wo-Ndzééndzév, himself a pagan, was charged with the responsibility of announcing every Saturday evening, by the use of a bugle or an elephant tusk, that the next day would be Sunday. The fathers negotiated with the Fon to initiate cultivation of a farm to feed 200 school children. Shey-wo Ndzééndzév was again charged with this new project. It was reported, perhaps with exaggeration, that 500 women turned out to hoe the farm. After the day's work, Father Lennartz gave the women clothes as a mark of appreciation. The women jubilated and sang all the way home. A small market was started in the very place where it still stands in Shisong today, with the primary intention of selling food to school children and with a secondary aim to provide a place where priests could have contact with pagans and possible future catechumens. "Les missionnaires ne s'occupaient pas seulement de l'évangélisation des enfants. Ils avaient institué la catéchèse des adultes qui avait lieu tous les jours. A Kumbo, il y avait la catéchèse des jeunes apprentis qui apprenaient auprès des frères et des Pères les métiers de menuisier, de fabricants de brique, de constructeurs et même le jardinage. Ils débutaient le travail à 8 h du matin. A 10 h, ils s'arrêtaient pour la catéchèse".¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ Ibid The missionaries were not only concerned with the evangelisation of the children. They had classes for adults which took place every day. In Kumbo there were doctrine classes for young apprentices who were learning wood work, brick fabrication, building and even gardening from the brothers and Fathers. They started at eight o'clock in the morning. At ten O'clock they stopped for doctrine classes. (author's translation.)



Sitting left to right: Father Francis Figl, Shu Faay Ndzendzev and Father Leo Onderwater. Standing Left to right: Aloysius Mbu, Aloysius Ndze andrew Nga and Paul Tangwa

The coastal areas under the direction of the Pallotine missionaries were ahead of the Grass Fields in evangelisation. It was from the Pallotine missions that some indigenes from the Grass Fields had enrolled in the catechumenate. Sasse or Eindiede. School boys who were now in Kimbo-Shisong received baptism at the time. Among them were Frederick Kodaye, who later became catechist at Nkongsamba, Joseph Nchoanga and William Mekuv. There was no Nso man among them. John Nchari, whose name has already been mentioned and who was a houseboy to Father Emontz, was among those baptized at this time. During this time, Ngondzen and Sov were opened as out-stations. Most of the converts were women. Father Emontz writes, "It was so because of the position of a woman who can be bought and sold as a slave of a man. Many women are simply sold to the Hausas for Money or for nice articles."¹⁷² "Les missionnaires ont été très tôt frappés par le problème de la femme et la polygamie. Pour eux, la femme noire n'était qu'une esclave ou une vile marchandise de l'homme. S'attaquer à la

¹⁷² Lafon Ibid

polygamie était l'une de leurs préoccupations. Ils ont sans doute critiqué le système dans leurs prédications ce qui progressivement dressera les chefs et les notables contre eux. Toutefois, la prédication ne pouvait à elle seule éradiquer un système social millénaire qui n'avait pas tellement de problème avec ceux qui en vivaient. C'est ainsi qu'ils ont songé que l'éducation des filles rendrait ces dernières plus conscientes de leur situation et elles-mêmes pourraient contribuer à améliorer leur sort. Les Pères feront donc venir les Soeurs de la Divine Providence de Münster en mai 1914 pour s'occuper de cette tâche. Les Sœurs en un an et demi qu'elles passeront à Kumbo vont commencer l'éducation de 70 filles. Elles leur apprenaient à lire, à écrire, à chanter et les travaux manuels : coudre, tricoter, laver, repasser. Les Soeurs s'occupaient aussi de deux centres de santé. Lorsqu'elles quittaient brusquement le Cameroun en 1915, leur labeur était bien prometteur. Leurs élèves continueront les correspondances avec elles après leur retour forcé en Europe ».¹⁷³

Like the revolt at Athens after Paul's preaching, which affected the trade in idols of the goddess Athena, many of the enemies of the missionaries were sorcerers and witch doctors. They made masks for juju, carved out of wood. Customarily women were permitted to see them during displays at death celebrations but not after, under pain of death. Missionaries had a negative

¹⁷³ Méthodes d'évangélisation des dehoniens Allemands au Cameroun (1912-1915) The missionaries were touched quite early by the problem of the women and polygamy. To them the black woman was just a slave or a common article of trade to the man. Fighting polygamy was one of their first preoccupations. They undoubtedly criticised the system in their first utterances, a thing which progressively pitted them against the chiefs and notables. Nevertheless utterances alone could not eradicate such an age old social system which had little or no problem with those who lived by it. It is as a consequence of this that they thought the education of the girls would make them later more aware of their situation and so could contribute to eradicate the problem. The fathers consequently called the sisters of the Divine Providence of Munster in May 1914 to handle this task. In a year and a half of their stay in Kumbo, the sisters started the education of 70 girls. They taught them how to read, to write, to sing, and manual work. Sewing, crocheting, washing, ironing. The sisters also took care of two health centres. In 1915 they were forced to leave Cameroon suddenly, their work was quite promising . The pupils continued communicating with them through letters after their forceful return to Europe (Author's translation).

impact on their trade. The whole issue of jujus and women and non-initiates became a source of trouble in the early years of Christianity.

In June 1914, a third group of missionaries arrived. They were two Fathers, two Brothers and five Sisters of the Divine Providence of Munster. Of the newly arrived, Father Baumeister was appointed to Kom and Father Foxius to Shisong. One Brother went to Shisong and the other was appointed to Ossing. The Sisters who arrived and settled in Shisong were: Sisters Tilberta Laerbusch, Damascena Kreuzheck, Oda Tholen (superior), Euphrenia Schütte and Hildeberta Cichy. They were to be in charge of the primary education of the girls and the hospital. The Sisters operated the first Domestic Science Centre at Shisong. It was attended by 70 girls, who went home regularly on weekends, returning to the mission on Sundays for services. These girls were from places as far away as Ntang, Sov, Ngondzen, Kiyan and Babessi. In opening the convent school, the sisters reasoned that it would be good for catechists to marry Christian women before going out into the field. It was in praise of such noble souls that Pope Benedict XV said:

“We must not go further without saying something about the work that is being done by women, for since the very earliest days of the Church they have always been remarkable for their diligence and zeal in assisting the preachers of the gospel. We want to single out here and single out for Our highest praise, those many women who have vowed their virginity to God and have gone to pursue their vocation on the missions. There they have devoted themselves to the education of children and to a great many other works of charity and devotion. This recognition of their achievements will, We hope, encourage the sisters and inspire them to further efforts on behalf of the Church. We hope too that they will hold fast to the conviction that the usefulness of their work will increase in proportion to the care they give to their own spiritual perfection.”¹⁷⁴

When the Sisters finally arrived, it was difficult to convince the Fon to send his daughters to school, but in the end, he saw the logic of the argument that his sons who were already attending school would in future want women

¹⁷⁴ Benedict XV cited op no. 30

who were educated. At first, a few were sent to school; others followed and soon the numbers were substantial. They taught the catechism in Lamnso, along with Cookery and Domestic Science.

The Hospital at Shisong

No sooner had the Sisters arrived in June 1914, than the people came up for medical treatment. The Sisters had brought medicine with them. In a society that survived strictly on traditional herbal medicines, the production of which involved a myriad of occult practices, to keep away diseases and save life, an alternative form of treatment in the form of western medicines must have been an intriguing novelty, but also frightening if not scary to many. The Sisters, schooled in western medical procedures, went out in search of reluctant patients, while others came voluntarily to the mission for treatment. Two homes were built for the sick: one in the mission for the sick men and boys and one in the convent for the women and girls.



The First Convent with five Reverend Sisters, 25th December 1935 with Father Francis Figl.

Instigated by the local medicine men, rumours began to make the rounds in the village, accusing the Christians of cannibalism. This accusation stemmed from the notion that Christians who died and were put into coffins for burial were later made into corn beef. As a result, the sick persons refused to come to the mission for treatment. Consequently, strong boys were appointed, among them the young and courageous Tangwa (later, Paul Tangwa) to carry reluctant patients to the Sisters' clinic for medical attention. People were forcefully carried in a net used as a stretcher for treatment. For his labours, Paul Tangwa earned the nickname of Paul baa Njav meaning, Paul, the one who carries people in a net.

The Erection of Prefecture of Adamawa

In the same year, the Holy See erected the Prefecture Apostolic. There were now nine Fathers, eight Brothers and five Sisters in the three mission stations of Shisong. With the erection of the new prefecture, a sense of hope and fulfilment must have begun glowing in the hearts of these early missionaries. The impact of the missionaries in the locality had become evident. Full of hope and optimism, the future by all standards was bright. Disaster struck in the midst of brighter hopes and dreams. In 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War, disaster struck unexpectedly when missionaries were savouring the sweetness of the labour of their hands. Mgr. Lennartz, the Prefect Apostolic, lamented bitterly about the war in 1915, "The cost of this war to Cameroon may never be assessed. All Fathers and Brothers are called by the German colonialists to Bamenda to join the army."¹⁷⁵ On June 8, 1914, the Allied Forces took Ossing in Mamfe Division. Christmas, 1914, the church in Shisong was overcrowded. The schools in Ntong, Oku and Babessi, with their catechists, organized a common service. The prefect Apostolic again lamented, "A year later, on Christmas of 1915, we would have baptised about 100 people. They would have been our catechists and school teachers."¹⁷⁶ On November 23, 1915, the missionaries were taken out of Shisong.

¹⁷⁵ J. Emonts op. cit..

¹⁷⁶ Ibid

The tactful English arrived in Kimbo when Monsigneur Lennartz was out on treks in Babessi. The Fathers and Sisters were invited to come to Kimbo; some said they were been invited for a meal while others contend that it was to exchange greetings. In Kimbo, they were told that they were wanted at Bamkikai, the German rest house near the present Saint Augustine's College in Nso. On arrival, they were told to continue to Angwaa (now Magba), the next rest house, 45 kilometres north of Kimbo. One of their faithful boys who went with them, Felix Chaiyi, reports that they were led via Banyong, Sarbabi and Gashaka in Nigeria and then to Lagos. From Lagos they went to Fernando Po and Rio Muni, where they joined the expelled Pallotine Fathers, who had brought the faith to the coastal regions of Cameroon. While at Fernando Po, they looked after the spiritual welfare of the interned Germans and Cameroonians of the grasslands, of whom about 900 were baptized out of about 1500 catechumens. The English soldiers occupied the abandoned mission compounds. They stole whatever they could carry. The school children were dispersed for good. The Christians ran away into hiding. The situation at the time is best summaries in these words, "La guerre interrompit l'activité missionnaire. Les pères et les Sœurs de Kimbo Furent emmenés en Angleterre, d'autres à Fernando Po."¹⁷⁷

The Interim Period between the Departure of German Sacred Heart Missionaries and Advent of the French Sacred Heart Missionaries

The departure of the German missionaries was a tragic experience for the school children and a blessing to the pagans. The school closed its doors and the mission was abandoned and deserted. The Nso people who had kept a safe distance from Christianity, remaining suspicious of the missionaries from the first day of their arrival, were encouraged in their conflict with the Christians. The practice of religion was considered tantamount to inviting the Germans back - not only the missionaries, but also the soldiers. Consequently, religious practice was stopped. Traditional authorities enacted laws that effectively made it illegal to practice Christianity or become a Christian. Clothes were not to be worn, except a small bandage-like-cloth between the legs for men and for women, a small flag hanging below the

¹⁷⁷ T.Fondjo, op. cit... The war interrupted missionary activity. The Fathers and sisters in Kimbo were taken to England others to Fernando PO.

navel.¹⁷⁸ As time went on, the Christian religion was forgotten. As one Christian remarked, “The whole place turned pagan.”¹⁷⁹

Peter Wamey was sent away to his native place, Babungo and if not for the intervention of John Maimo, who protested bitterly and forcefully to His Royal Highness, Fon Nga Bifon I, his Nso wife, Elizabeth Yaadily, would not have gone with him. The indigenes wanted him to go alone and argued that Elizabeth’s parents in Melim never gave her in marriage according to proper Nso marriage customs. In spite of such hostile attitude towards the Christian religion, a few faithful Christians prayed in secret and held secret meetings. It was a question of the early church and its predicament being re-enacted. “The Catholic Church is not an intruder in any country; nor is she alien to any people. It is only right, then, that those who exercise her sacred ministry should come from every nation, so that their compatriots can look to them for instruction in the law of God and leadership on the way to salvation. Wherever the local clergy exist in sufficient numbers and are suitably trained and worthy of their holy vocation, there you can justly assume that the work of the missionary has been successful and that the Church has laid her foundations well. And if, after these foundations have been laid and these roots sunk, a persecution should be raised to dislodge her, there need be no reason to fear that she could not withstand the blow.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ The Fon’s wives were to continue with “eves” which they kept until 1960 when the Nso improvement union, objected to nudity and bought one hundred pieces of cloth from the Bamenda United African Company (UAC), as its own practical remedy to nudity. Even after this had been done, some chiefs and a good number of elderly women objected to the use of such clothing. Later, the same body bought salt and oil as additional inducements. But the matter was only resolved, when some of these women accompanied the Fon of Nso to Bamenda for official tours. There, they themselves observed that most women were well dressed especially the wives of the Fon of Bali Nyonga. Experience proved a valuable teacher. It was forbidden for Christians to go to Shisong for prayers.

¹⁷⁹ J. Emonts, op. cit...

¹⁸⁰ BENEDICT XV.(1919) Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*: on the Propagation of the Faith Throughout the world.. Translated by Thomas J. M. Burke, SJ Washington, DC: National Catholic Welfare Office,

The Catechumenate In Douala

In 1916, there was no baptized Christian in Nso. Paul Tangwa, alias Baa Njav, a very courageous and determined catechumen, conceived the idea that it would be good to go to Douala and receive baptism. Seven of the old school boys accepted the challenge very willingly, namely: Paul Tangwa, John Maimo, Francis Seem, Joseph Tar, Simon Bongjo Andreas Nga and Maria Bongayimo. This group went to Babungo to sound the opinion of Peter Wamey . He agreed to take them to Douala and to introduce them to the priests there. The journey took then eight days to Nkongsamba, from where Paul Tangwa paid the train fare for all of them to Douala. At Bonaberi in Douala, they were introduced as catechumens from Nsoland. As has already been mentioned, during the war, the Allied Forces sent away all the Germans from the country including missionaries. The army chaplains of the Allied forces helped Christians wherever they could. In Douala, there were two chaplains, Father Douvir and Father Retter. They met the catechumens from Shisong on their arrival.

The Reconnaissance Mission of Joseph Shanahan in the Southern Cameroons

On April 12, 1916, His Excellency, the Governor of Nigeria gave Father Shanahan leave temporarily to occupy the mission buildings in the Cameroons. This tour was meant to assess the possibility of reopening the missions, which the war had forced the German missionaries to abandon. Evidence of Shanahan's visit to Kumbo showed that he was purely on a reconnaissance mission. In a confidential memo on November 17, 1919, to The Resident of the Cameroon Province, the Divisional Officer of Bamenda, R.H. Crawford, said "that the property which belong to the Roman Catholic Mission, with the exception of the books and papers, were handled over to the Rev. Father Shanahan, Temporary Ecclesiastical Administrator of the Catholic Mission, Prefecture Apostolic, on 10th February 1919 for which I hold his receipt. Please see my memo No. E/125/177/1918 dated 25th March 1919, authorising this."¹⁸¹ Earlier in February, Shanahan had written a comprehensive report on the state of the mission in Kumbo. He concluded

¹⁸¹ Confidential Memo No. E/504/11/1919

that the building itself was in good repair, at least as good as may be expected in the case of a building unoccupied for four years.”¹⁸²

Although Father Shanahan retired to far away Ibo land he was seen in administrative cycles as the custodian of the property in Cameroon. When Father Schuster of the German Sacred Heart Missionary wanted to obtain books from the abandoned missions, he was told to apply through Father Shanahan, as he was especially appointed from Rome to look for after the Adamawa Missions.¹⁸³

On account of the unsettled state of certain parts of the division, colonial authorities were not keen on allowing German missionaries in the territories but recommended that, if they were to re-open, nobody should be allowed except those recommended by Father Shanahan. According to them, “On no account should the German Missionaries be allowed to return to the division.”¹⁸⁴ During the period of absence of the missionaries, the mission buildings in Kumbo deteriorated. A memorandum from the District Officer in Bamenda to the Resident said among other things, “I have now to report that the roof of the Mission House has fallen in. The contents of the stories are thus accessible. Orders have been given to the chief of Kumbo to repair the roof immediately and the best that present circumstances permit has been done to safeguard the property from theft, pending the completion of a new roof.”¹⁸⁵ On December 4, 1916, Podevin commended the chief of Kumbo for the care he had taken of the mission property.

The site allocated to the mission by the German government was about I mile from the Fon’s compound. It was made up of a dwelling house for the Fathers, the Chapel and the school room. Mission property was safeguarded during the war by the Fons and later handed over to Plissonneau. The following was a general description of the building of the Roman Catholic mission compound and buildings:

“The main building occupied by the priests, built with sun dried bricks, white lime and mud used for laying bricks, doors and windows of

¹⁸² Correspondence from Ecclesiastical Administrator J. S. Shanahan to the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division 10th February 1919.

¹⁸³ Ibid

¹⁸⁴ Ibid

¹⁸⁵ BNA- SD/A 1916/1

rough sawn timber, grass roof supported by bush sticks of ten rooms, length of building 90 feet, width of building 30 feet, height of building 12 feet to the top of the brick wall. This building was evidently in the course of construction. With proper doors, windows frames and an iron roof, it would be excellent. The school house was of the same dimensions as those mentioned above, but no doors or windows Dimensions were the same. Similar descriptions were available for the living house for pupils. What was common to all the buildings was that they were in various stages of deterioration which were not worth repairing. The house occupied by the sisters was under the hill about a quarter of an hour from the Mission. It had six rooms built of very rough sun dried bricks, with a grass roof; doors and windows were of rough sawn timber. There were also several bush buildings all in a bad repair.”¹⁸⁶

The British colonial administration took great care to maintain and safeguard the property of the mission. In 1919, the roof of the Mission house had fallen in. Instructions were given to the chief to maintain and improve the buildings as well as to provide possible provision for the safeguarding of contents pending repair.¹⁸⁷

Estimates for repair were made, indicating the approximate quantity of material needed and taking into account the cost of material needed, the cost of transporting material that was not available in the locality and the cost of labour. Repairs were not to extend beyond what was necessary for the safeguarding of the contents from bad weather and theft. Instructions were also given to consider repair where the costs were excessive. Alternative proposals for storing the contents of the building in question were also to be considered.

The sum of £200 was made available for repairs to Mission buildings in Bamenda Division, out of the total of 800 authorized to be expended out of plantation funds. The Secretary of southern Provinces was of the opinion that “it is impossible for Nigeria to provide staff to supervise the work and it

¹⁸⁶BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Vol. III page 502 31st of July 1916

¹⁸⁷ BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Confidential Memorandum from the District Officer Bamenda to the Resident Cameroon Province, Buea 20th December, 1921

is doubtful is material can “be obtained.”¹⁸⁸ Among the list of items belonging to the mission was a horse that got drowned en route, which was valued at 4 pounds. The total value of the Mission property in Kumbo in 1917 stood at 12 pounds, seven pence and 9 shillings.¹⁸⁹

While the colonial administration was preoccupied with the issue of repairs, Shanahan was concerned with the future of the Christians. His Lordship himself told the neophytes that, from what he had seen, Nso was a pagan tribe and it would take 25 years to have even one Christian. This turned out to be an overly pessimistic view. The zealous Christians begged to be allowed to return to their homeland and meet the challenge. This they did in 1919. While the catechumens were doing their best to keep the faith alive, a far more powerful contingent of Cameroonians in Fernando Po were being introduced to the rubrics of the Catholic faith. Many were Cameroonian soldiers drafted into the German army. “Dans cette ne se trouvaient également 1000 soldat camerounais enrôlés dans l’armée allemande. Beaucoup d’entre eux se firent baptiste.”¹⁹⁰

Many of these former German soldiers received baptism in Fernando Po. Fathers Schuster, Foxius and Baumeister from the Grass Fields of Cameroon were interned in Fernando Po. They took great care to give doctrine lessons to the captured Cameroonian soldiers from the highlands of Cameroon, while the Pallotine Fathers looked after the other soldiers. They baptized more than 900 indigenes and instructed more than 1500 for a considerable length of time. The unbaptized indigenes would also have been baptized if they had not been sent home suddenly in 1919. These numbers were made up of soldiers, soldiers’ wives, carriers and messengers who had been conscripted into the German army. The Nso tribe had been obliged to give so many carriers for the march down south and they were all interned in Fernando Po. More than 800 were already baptized when they were released. These, together with those baptized at Douala, formed the core of Christians towards the closing stages of the war.

¹⁸⁸ BNA- SD/A 1916/1Memorandum no. 163/1916.X from the Resident of the Cameroon Province to the District Officer Bamenda Division 19th February 1919

¹⁸⁹BNA- SD/A 1916/1Correspondence from the Divisional Officer Bamenda to Resident of British Cameroons, 23rd of March 1917

¹⁹⁰ T. Fondjo op. cit..

One of the noticeable signs carried by these ex-German soldiers turned Christians were shoes and clothes. Clothing was not what the indigenes longed for. Nudity was no problem; it was considered out of touch to carry clothes. Clothes were symbols of German tyranny and brutality than a values to be cherished. Photographs taken by missionaries and colonial authorities portrayed this fact vividly. For this reason, in Bamenda they were given official permission by the authorities to keep their clothes on. The District Officer also presented a picture of the blessed Lady to them in nice cloth material and advised that this be placed on the table during evening prayers. Mama Maria Bongayimo, who died on May 9, 1985, was the only woman in the group. During her interment, John Maimo, who was baptized on the same day with her, called on all the Nso women to imitate Mama Maria, who was not afraid of death on account of her faith. It is said that on the day they arrived Nso; she wore one of her best gowns and went to the market. While others regarded her as a spirit, many women revered her dress and resolved to enrol as catechumens if only to run away from nudity. Clothing became a problem in the post-World War years. It made the converts feel pride in themselves, much to the annoyance of traditional authorities.



Paul Tangwa- "Banjav" the first catechist of Kumbo as a young man in 1918.

Traditional Animosity and Return to Ancestral Paths

With the German Church and Administration gone before they had hardly made an impact, the Nso traditional authorities got it into their heads that they had seen the last of the Whiteman. It was decreed throughout the land that, “the country was back on its ancient path.” A public bonfire was made of European clothes and the clansmen were ordered to return to the traditional Tikari style of attiring themselves. The Fon resumed the active sovereignty that he had wielded before the coming of the Germans.¹⁹¹ Colonial authorities and traditional rulers viewed the new brand of Christianity, led by indigenes, with suspicion and sought to limit its activities.

“Shortly after, the mission boys arrived from Douala with a letter from the Resident saying that they were to be allowed to commence church work. They belong to Kumbo, the chief of which place requested me not to allow any native to start church work unless a Whiteman was with them as they refuse to carry out orders and cause trouble. A Babungo man named Wami, who I had previously warned, accompanied Tangwa and Alice. All warned that they were not to start any church work without further orders. Took one medallion from Wambo for safe custody until such permission received and one embroidered cross from Wami.”¹⁹²

It was the customs of the Banso Fon and of Banso village heads to live in segregations separate from their people. They were surrounded by compounds of the members of their court. In violation of native law and custom, a native ex-German teacher, Mukong, who was not a native of Nso, created a shack in one of the Fon’s compounds and started pro-German propaganda under the pretence of religion. Podevin, the District Officer, sentenced him to six months I.H.L. for conspiring against the Fon and the English authorities.¹⁹³ Orders were given that church services were not to be held in the Fon’s precincts.

In May of the same year, two more mission teachers, Tangwa and Lice, arrived. The Fon requested that mission work be postponed until the arrival of English priests. Podevin warned them against spreading German propaganda, but, in June 1916, they spread a report that the Germans were

¹⁹¹ Fonlon Bernard: *A simple story Simply Told* (1983) CEPER Yaoundé

¹⁹² BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Vol II page 370 May 30th

¹⁹³ BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Podevin’s Diary 19/4/1916

coming back and that the natives need not worry about the English. Podevin went to the Fon and the Fon requested him to remove Tangwa, stating that even in German times he encouraged his people to disobey him.¹⁹⁴ “In 1916, the Fon requested the removal of the mission boy, Tangwa, as he refused to recognise his authority or obey his orders. The other convert, Lice, was an ex-chinda and obeyed the chief. Chief Mamfor stated that these boys did not tell him the Germans were coming back - but he most emphatically stated that he did not want any more mission palaver. When the mission was there, they used to take his boys and, once they were under the influence of the priests, they used to undermine his authority and influenced other boys who had nothing to do with the mission, which created difficulties when he had turned out labour for roads or transport.”¹⁹⁵

Tangwa was arrested but released shortly thereafter upon his assurance that he would in future carry out the Fon’s orders. He was released upon an undertaking to be of good behaviour. In case of any acts contrary to this, he was to be sent to Bamenda. However, Tangwa did not abide. Further complaints against him appeared to have been made to Podevin when he was on the Bangam patrol, but no action was taken against him. A statement by the Court messenger, Tumenta, taken on December 16 reads:

“Acting on the Divisional Officer’s orders, I took Tangwa and another Mission boy to Kumbo. I gave them to the King and told him to send them back to Bamenda if they did not behave. When I was in Bagam with the Divisional Officer, two chindas came from Kumbo and complained that the mission boys were working for the Germans in Kumbo. The Divisional Officer ordered me to go to Kumbo where I arrested the two boys and detained them for two weeks until the Divisional Officer came. Tangwa said the King did not like him because for German time he made medicine.”¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Confidential Memorandum No. 372/64/21 20th December 1921 from the District Officer Bamenda to the Resident in Buea Cameroon Province

¹⁹⁵ BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Notes from the Buea Regional Archives without acknowledgment of authorship

¹⁹⁶ BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Confidential Memorandum No. 372/64/21 20th December 1921 from the District Officer Bamenda to the Resident in Buea Cameroon Province

Surprisingly for him, the infant, leaderless Christian Church proved too strong for him. A leader sprang up amongst them in the person of Mbiybe Fontem, formerly known as Paul Tangwa and mockingly surnamed Tangwa Bah-Njav. He rallied the bewildered neophytes around him and inspired them by word and example, with new courage and determination, to keep the Christian faith alive. Obviously, the Fon was not prepared to brook such an open and ominous challenge to his retrieved authority: arrests, scourgings and lock-ups became the daily lot of the Christians; the brunt of all this was borne by Tangwa Bah-Njav. Indeed, if the Interregnum between the German expulsion and the setting up of the Franco-English co-dominion had lasted longer, blood would have been shed and some would have died for Christ among the Nso clansmen. During the German Regime, the Christians and the animists in Kumbo appeared to have had minor disputes, but it was not until the ex-German soldiers attempted to conduct a mission of their own that serious trouble began.¹⁹⁷ Fortunately, however, the traditional authorities soon realized that their exultant hope that they were done with the Whiteman's rule was a pipe dream. With the setting up of the allied condominium, the Sacred Heart Fathers of the French Province arrived in the grasslands in 1920 under the leadership of Monsignor Plissonneau. A group of them took over the Shisong Mission and brought relief to the harassed Christian Community.¹⁹⁸

Back home, the new Christians began praying publicly and giving doctrine classes in the house of Joseph Tar at Mbivtinmbang in Kimbo. News of their arrival spread like wild fire, especially as they attended the weekly market at Kimbo wearing crucifixes. Their former classmates, boys and girls, came back one after the other and joined the group. Paul Tangwa became the catechist that same year, 1919. The Christians built a small mud hut to serve as a church building in the same compound to accommodate the increase in numbers. The church that had almost died was resurrected and attracted many people, especially the women folk. Pagans snubbed the Christians, who wore clothes. The fury of the pagans against the Christians continued to mount. Families made every effort, not excluding the use of force, to stop their kin and kith from joining this new religion. Unfounded rumours, fabricated by the enemies of Christianity, began making the rounds

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

¹⁹⁸ Lafon. op. cit..

in the village. Some were scary enough to prevent anyone who did not know the truth about Christianity from becoming a Christian.

The Christians celebrated with pomp in the little church the feast day of St. Joseph on March 19, 1920. During service, the Christians sang and clapped their hands with joy. That same year, regular rains did not fall at the expected time. The pagans denounced the Christians to the Fon for holding the rain in the sky. "When the rain is about to fall, these Christians clap their hands and the rains return to the sky," they contended.¹⁹⁹ The Fon immediately asked the Christians to break down their small church. Nevertheless, he gave them permission to cut bamboo and build another church. The new church was more attractive than the previous one. Many unmarried pagan women and the wives of people submitted to the Church. At the time, other catechumens, like Francis Lole, set out for Sandem in Northern Nigeria, a journey lasting some 30 days by foot, with the intention of receiving baptism.

The fury of the pagans intensified as the number of Christians increased. Members of the same family mocked and beat up those who attempted to go to church. This was the plight of Christian converts. Families stigmatised and ostracised their kin and kith if they ventured into the enticing flirt with the Whiteman's religion. Families performed death ceremonies and rituals for converts, usually symbolized by the tearing of a new raffia bag. Families invoked ancestors to witness the burial of the child who had errantly fallen away from his lineage by deleting their names from the family register or ancestral record. This was reminiscent of the early Church. William Barclay writes, "Often the door was shut for ever in the face of the one who had accepted Christ. Christianity often came to send, not peace, but a sword that divided families in two. It was literally true that a man might have to love Christ more than he loved father or mother, wife, or brother or sister."²⁰⁰

When the indigenes who shunned Christianity in Nsoland had seen for themselves that no amount of intimidation and blackmail could stop the Christians from going to church, many stories were fabricated to scare people - some with no small success in certain quarters. It was said that Christians would have no children. When it became clear that this was a

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Barclay, William (1974), *The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. I, The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh, p.107

myth, the pagans predicted that the children would be stunted, for they were being fed daily on cassava and sweet potatoes instead of the usual children's food of cocoyams. Time proved them wrong. In all these trying days, the catechist, Paul Tangwa and the rest of the Christians kept up the faith. This has been beautifully summarised: "Un peu partout cependant ce sont les catéchistes admirables formes par les père allemands qui réussirent à maintenir la vie chrétienne intacte dans les communautés locales. Ce ne fut pas toujours facile. Dans la région de Kumbo, par exemple, le départ des pères avait provoqué un réveil du paganisme. Les missions furent pillées, les chrétiens persécutés et bon nombre furent de se réfugier au Nigeria." ²⁰¹

The French Sacred Heart Fathers in the Grass Fields

For some time, military chaplains ran the missions after the expulsion of the German Fathers. They must have found it difficult to cope with the dual functions of military chaplaincy and pastoral work among the many parish communities. General Aymerich wanted French missionaries in the French sector of the then partitioned Cameroon to take over parish work. He wrote to Mgr. Augouard in Brazzaville, but the response was not favourable. Next, he made contact with the Fathers in Paris. They agreed to come and were followed later by the French Fathers of the Sacred Heart of St. Quentin, founded by Father Dehon. By an act of divine providence, it was members of one religious order from one country replacing their confreres from another country.

During this period, some French Fathers based at Dschang visited Shisong occasionally and only a few baptisms were recorded. On May 5, 1915, five catechumens were baptized. Leonard Fossi and Mathias Njambé worked as catechists and their devotion, commitment to service and determination to bring many catechumens and Protestants to the Catholic Church was evident. ²⁰² In 1920, the French Fathers of the Society of the Sacred Heart of St. Quentin arrived and took over the Apostolic Prefecture at Adamawa with its seat at Foumban. Father Plissonneau became Prefect Apostolic. "The 1920 Annual report of Mr. Hunt reported the arrival of Rev. Father Plissonneau with his credentials to take over the keys of the Kumbo

²⁰¹ Fondjo, op. cit. p. 21

²⁰² Ibid.

Mission. He made complaints (when at Bamenda) of Kumbo people oppressing the Christians but when they were sent to the temporal church built by the Christians at Kumbo itself (the German mission is about one and a half miles from Kumbo) was set on fire.”²⁰³ With the new generosity of Fon Njoya, they secured land in Foumban and were able to rekindle the flame of the missions. In a letter written on December 23, 1920, the Prefect Apostolic of the Father General of the German Fathers of the Society of the Sacred Heart wrote:

“To do any useful work here we have to open absolutely two stations. One in Foumban and the other one in Kumbo. Only by settling in Foumban and working there, we are outside the territory which our German Fathers have worked which lies completely on the English side. In Kumbo, the teaching of doctrine is in the hands of the catechists. I have been a little while back in Kumbo to visit this mission and to see about the reopening of the head station. The district is interesting to me especially through the number of Christians, which I found. I have written down 200 in Kumbo, 30 in Foumban, together with 500 in the villages which I so far could reach.”²⁰⁴

Merchants trading between East and West Cameroon reported the presence of priests in East Cameroon to Paul Tangwa, who went in search of them. One Joseph Nga sent this message: “Paul Tangwa found this priest and informed them of the progress of the church in Nso and invited them to come visit Kumbo.” This is confirmed by the following: “A Kumbo, un catéchiste Zele, Paul Tangwa, regroupe les chrétiens, puis va à Foumban chercher Mgr. Plissonneau pour les Bansos dix-neuf catéchumènes furent baptiste et 150 inscrit.”²⁰⁵

Many Christians who had not gone to the sacraments for months since their last Easter duty was done, either in Calabar or in Shadem in Nigeria, remember well the visit of Monsigneur Plissonneau in 1920. The Christians received the Monsigneur with great jubilation and sang joyfully, leading him

²⁰³ BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Hand written Notes from the Buea Regional Archives possibly from the successor of Mr. Hunt

²⁰⁴ Lafon, op.cit

²⁰⁵ J. Emonts op. cit...

from Bui River to Kimbo Town. After the Baptism of the 19 catechumens, the Christian community celebrated. Monsigneur Plissonneau was in Kumbo for four days on this his maiden visit.

The festivities of the newly baptized must have greatly angered the hostile pagans for, on the very day the Monsigneur left, the church and surrounding houses were burnt down, including that of Joseph Tar, who had donated the plot. The property that the Monsigneur had left behind was destroyed. Paul Tangwa and Felix Chaiyi informed the Fon at midnight. He was very surprised and is said to have exclaimed, ‘Those who boasted that they would burn it have actually done it!’²⁰⁶

Certainly, the presence of Monsigneur Plissonneau in Kumbo must have raised a lot of dust, which the traditional diehards could not stomach. For example, it is reported that, “Matters appear to have been peaceful until the arrival of the Fathers at the end of 1920 when Tangwa constructed another hut in the Royal precincts. “He brought complaints to Hunt that the Fon’s chindas were ill-treating his converts quite probable as he reopened his private chapel.(Mukong...also claimed that that the chindas had deprived the mission of 4 pigs, 2 elephant tusks, 1 leopard skin and 46 marks and Hunt awarded in his favour though no evidence appears as to how the mission became possessed of these articles.”²⁰⁷

It seems that such claims against the Fon and his chindas enraged the indigenes for, shortly after, the chindas vented their spleen. On December 9, 1920, Hunt received a report that the Kumbo mission chapel had been burnt down. He adds in his diary that, “this is almost certainly due to incendiarism on the part of the anti-Christian element which is very strong in Kumbo.” In fact, the mission chapel was not burnt or interfered with in any way. The building destroyed was teacher Tangwa’s private house in which he conducted services against Mr. Podevin’s and Fong’s orders. After the interview with Monsigneur Plissonneau, the District Officer entered in his diary that he had “told him he was fortunate to have only the bush built church burnt and not the big mission house. Told him it was natural to overlook past offences as it was natural for the conservative Negro to dislike new ideas and object to his children deserting the Gods of their Fathers.”

²⁰⁶ Lafon, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁷ BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Quotations from the Diary of D. C Duncan in a memo from the D.O. Bamenda Division to the Resident in Buea 20th December 1921,

Plissonneau for sure had not understood what it meant for children to desert the gods of their father.”²⁰⁸

On December 15, the Divisional Officer for Bamenda, who was in Kumbo at the time, wrote that he found the following entry in the diary of Mr. Hunt “saw Kumbo people are burning the church and received complaints of ill treatment of Christians. They said they had no objection to mission but resented interference with their women kind, who were enticed to Fouban by Christians. When he met Plissonneau, he pitched a woeful tale of persecution. On January 9, Hunt held a meeting of Kumbo people and lectured then on religious tolerance. He told them they would have to pay for the damages, chiefly to the property of Tangwa, who seemed a decent youth, which amounted to some 1600 marks. He threatened to burn all drinking houses if there was further persecution of Christians. He added that the eight men arrested for threatening to burn the church would be sent to Bamenda to await his pleasure”.²⁰⁹

Women remained at the centre of controversy in Bamenda and the cause of the displeasure against the Christians. Hunt investigated a complaint that two young women were retained in the mission teacher’s house all night. Father Bintner’s only defence was that the house was not the teacher’s, but a house for travelling Fathers. Numerous complaints were brought against the mission teachers when the Divisional Officer for Bamenda visited Kumbo. Twenty-five married women, seduced from their husbands, were now living with the teachers. When Hunt questioned Father Bintner, he denied all knowledge and only stated that all women should return to their homes immediately after catechism. “Coincidentally doctrine classes were held in Tangwa’s establishment between 6pm and 8pm when all respectable married women should be at home cooking their husband’s food.”²¹⁰

Investigations in the native court in the presence of Father Lebrun led to the appearance of twenty-five women by Tangwa. The first was a married woman of eighteen years. She gave evidence that she was seduced by Teacher Nsai two years ago and had been living in adultery with him ever since. The

²⁰⁸ BNA- SD/A 1922//1Confidential Memorandum from the District Officer Bamenda Division to the Resident 20th December 1921

²⁰⁹ BNA- SD/A 1922 /1Confidential Memorandum from the District Officer Bamenda Division to the Resident 20th December 1921,

²¹⁰ Ibid.

second case was a sixteen-year-old married woman who had left her husband's compound with the intention of marrying the teacher Nsai. The third was an eighteen-year-old married woman who had deserted her husband and was now living in Tangwa's quarters. She had abandoned all wish of living with her husband and was unable to account for her presence in Tangwa's quarters. Lebrun was very uncomfortable with the state of affairs. With the mission unable to bring the situation to a peaceful settlement, the Fon stepped in to solve matters. The women were sent to their father's compounds and sixteen of the twenty-five were sent to Fouban. The Divisional Officer was of the opinion that the deportation must have been made with the assistance or connivance of European Missionaries.²¹¹

The Divisional Officer concluded his confidential memorandum on the issue of the church in Kumbo with the following conclusion. Even within the British administration, there was lack of unanimity on the course of the action to follow. For example, the actions of Hunt in Kumbo were viewed with suspicion. Even his superiors "altogether failed to understand why Mr. Hunt awarded the 1600 marks. The hut was constructed against orders from the Fon. According to the Assistant District Officer, Mr. Gregg, it was 20 x 10 feet without foundation. If Tangwa's property was valued at 1450 marks, missionary work should be a lucrative profession. Being aware of the native customs, he deliberately set out to defy the Fong by building within his private precincts"²¹² The Divisional Officer remarked that, "During the six days of conversation with the Fathers, they kept the existence of the new mission work in the dark. Whereas the Government has treated them quite openly in all interviews, they have been working underground. Mr. Hunt did not visit the site of the burnt hut but deputed juniors to do so on his behalf. The situation in Kumbo was summarised as follows:

"1600 mark compensation paid to Tankwa (Teacher) who disobeyed the orders by building on the king's land... married women continually seduced by teachers and retained in their houses, services held after dark

²¹¹Ibid

²¹²BNA- SD/A 1922/1 Confidential Memorandum from the District Officer Bamenda Division to the Resident 20th December 1921

(6 pm to 8 pm) quite unnecessary unless there is an ulterior motive... priest of Belgian mission untruthful”²¹³

Mission teachers were accusing of seducing married women and retaining them in their houses. Services were held for women after dark. According to the Divisional Officer there must have been some ulterior motive on the part of the mission teachers. Teacher Nsai, who had brought the mission into so much disrepute, was finally excommunicated for adultery for a period of three months. Even with such a show of goodwill on the part of the mission, the Divisional Officer saw the measure as coming too late and too little. For him, the main aim of the mission was to break down native authority and he considered the priest of the Belgian mission “untruthful.”

After the investigation had revealed that indeed the mission boys were not idle, Father William Bintner had no choice than to undertake to be of good behaviour and to keep his mission boys under control. The question that remained a bone of contention, “the woman palaver”, featured prominently in his letter of July 14, 1921, to the District Officer, Bamenda Division. “As to the woman question, I have ordered, if some woman, that is like for come for learn doctrine and she can’t return, because his way is far, to allow her to sleep in a room which is behind the church, but no man is to dare to sleep in this room. It is a closed room, what I built on the church for Father if he remains some time into the mission because there is no other house for himself”.²¹⁴

Christian Villages and Runaways Wives

As in other places, women who converted to Christianity remained a potential source of trouble. With the experiences of Kumbo, Njinikom, Baseng and Esu, some traditional rulers exhibited caution when it came to offers of churches. The issue of women becoming Christians troubled both

²¹³ BNA- SD/A 1922/Confidential Memorandum from the District Officer Bamenda Division to the Resident 20th December 1921

²¹⁴ BNA- SD/A 1922/Confidential Memorandum from the District Officer Bamenda Division to the Resident 20th December 1921

²¹⁴Lafon.

colonial and traditional authorities throughout the early years of evangelisation. Precisely for this reason apprehensive traditional rulers tabled conditions for accepting missions to settle. The case of Ndu shows how the equation of women was not only delicate, but essential for the survival of missions and the maintenance of social order.

Father Emontz visited Ndu in 1914, but the reception was far from friendly. He was unable to obtain food or carriers from Ndu. The first Christian of Ndu was William Mformi, baptised in 1925. His marriage raised eyebrows from several quarters. His wife-to-be had been a wife of the Fon of Nso. This marriage can best be understood in the context of the time, which saw disagreement over the control of women who were presumably seduced by mission boys. In 1934, Mformi became the chief of Ndu. As a former Christian, one would have expected that Christianity would make new inroads with the best facility. This was not to be the case. In 1949, the Church was accepted in Ndu. For the first time, a memorandum of understanding between the Church and the chief with his traditional council was drawn up, 'Laws concerning the building of the Roman Catholic Church in Wiya ground.' It read:

“We have agreed that the R.C.M. church should be in our country and we have given them the following laws:

1. We do not agree that the chief's women should go to church. If any chief's wife is found attending the church, we will send you away with your church.
2. No sub-chief's wife should attend the church.
3. If any woman comes to the church and you trace and see that she ran away from her husband, do away with the woman and send her to her husband. If the husband also likes the church then you keep them.
4. We do not want the church to do anything unless permitted to do so
5. Before any wants to marry, you should see that the dowry has been paid
6. Anything binding the chief's order, the church should also put a hand in it.”²¹⁵

After the meeting, a plot was given to the church, but no success story was to follow. A bamboo church was built several times, but each time was

²¹⁵Lafon.

blown down by tornados. A mud brick church was built in 1958, but it suffered the same fate. In 1965, another church building was constructed, but plenty of talk by non-Christians, Muslims and the Baptist Christians made it impossible for the church to make any headway. It became clear that the road to success was not with the indigene. It was only with the influx of people, who had were already baptized as catholic Christians elsewhere, such as plantation workers, civil servants, or businessmen, Christianity was able to take root.

The Christians passed the whole night in vigil around the ashes of the burnt church. In the morning, they prayed and sang many holy songs in praise of their God, the echoes of which were heard far and wide. In spite of the bold, faithful commitment on the part of the Christians, the pagans mocked them from a cliff overlooking the burnt church. The pagans believed that the burning of the church signalled the end of the movement in the town. The Fon dispatched a messenger to the Divisional Officer in Bamenda, Mr. Duncan, while the Christians sent Aloysius Mukong to Buea to contact the Resident, Major Ruxton.

An inquiry was conducted and the Christians gave the names of those responsible for the fire disaster. The presence of the priest notwithstanding, the pagans did not surrender. They stepped up their persecution of the Christians under the instigation of the Nwerong Society. The Fon closed all the churches in Nso and barred the church doors with the traditional nwerong symbol called “Mbang Nwerong.” With no success in sight and with increasing trouble, Ruxton had no other alternative than to come to Kumbo himself. Ruxton was a high Anglican churchman. He personally prevailed on the Fon to open the church doors and went in and heard holy mass, which was celebrated there and then.²¹⁶ He convinced the Fon that religion was free and that no one should be molested for his religious practice.

Generally, the Roman Catholic missions in most areas suffered the same fate. In 1924, the Roman Catholic mission at Binka in Nsungli was burned down. A number of events led up to this. In 1923, the Chief of Binka asked that a Mission might be established in his quarter so that those of his people desirous of learning could do so without migrating to Tangmunkem. A teacher was supplied, a church built and for some months all went well. Then

²¹⁶ Ibid

matrimonial disputes arose and relations between Christians and pagans became strained. Finally, two granddaughters of the chief, each between 9 and 10 years of age, disappeared. After a search, they were discovered at the Roman Catholic Mission in Tangmunkem.

There were three versions of the story surrounding the escape of the daughters of the chief. According to the Assistant District Officer, "One of the girls declared that they had gone voluntarily to Tangmunken because the chief's daughters were not allowed to attend the Mission at Tangmunkem and that they only met a Binka Christian, Chetu, on the road. The other declared that Chetu took them against their will. According to a teacher at Tangmunkem, they arrived by themselves with the intention to learn the doctrine, whereupon they were received into the church compound"²¹⁷.

The Chief of Binka is said to have sent an elder with two chindas to the Chief to Tangmunkem to recover the girls. The Chief of Tangmunkem in turn sent them to the Mission compound, where they endeavoured to persuade the girls to return to Binka. The elder attempted to take them by force. At any rate, the teacher and other Christians caught and beat the two Chindas, while the elder was bound. The teacher intended to send them to Bamenda, but one Chinda escaped on the road. The other was brought to the teacher at Lu. The Chief ordered the teachers to release the men, but they refused. When the Binka elder and Chindas returned with the story to Binka, there was widespread indignation and, in the absence of the Chief, the elders of the quarter took it upon themselves to drive the Christians out of the church. During the night, two events took place. The church was burnt down and Chetu disappeared with one the Chief's wives. The Christians attributed the fire to the pagans whilst the latter alleged that Chetu did it. However, no direct evidence was forthcoming on either point. Chetu then took the chief's wife to the Mission at Kumbo. Some months later, Father Scully brought the woman to the Chief, but the chief refused her since she was already pregnant by Chetu. She was at the Mission at Lu.

In the absence of direct evidence, the blame for the destruction of the church was laid on the whole population of Binka under the Collective Punishment ordinance. At the same time, it appeared that a teacher, Nchali at

²¹⁷ The Burning of the Roman Catholic Church at Binka, a memo written by the Assistant District Officer, area of jurisdiction not indicated but certainly he was in charge of Bamenda Division.

Tangmunkem, would also be prosecuted for being accessory to assault and illegal detention. In the midst of the confusion, the District Officer concluded, "It is essential that the burning of churches in the Division must be checked, but it is difficult to see how action will be advantageously taken in these cases, especially as the crime took place about one year, ago. Their errors have been clear both to the inhabitants of Binka and to the Christians of Tangmunkem and perhaps it would be advisable to leave the matter so. The teacher Nchali of Tangmunkem was adversely reported upon in 1923 and his somewhat drastic methods are not likely to be conducive in this somewhat primitive area."²¹⁸

Because of the random and haphazard contraction of marriages, the colonial authorities had to regulate even ecclesiastical weddings. For example, an extract from Gazetes no. 74, December 4, 1924, stipulated that the following places of Public Worship had license for the celebration of marriage under section 6 of the Marriage Ordinance: Roman Catholic Church at Kumbo and The Roman Catholic Church at Bamenda

The church in Binka was not the last church to be burnt down. In Babaji another church was burnt down. In 1924, Father Moran, the Superior of the Catholic Mission in Kumbo, wrote to the Divisional Officer for Bamenda Division, W.C. Hunt expressing his satisfaction on the measures which the administrator had taken "I am glad to note that you have given your kind consideration to the affair of the burning of the church at Babaji. I have already made and I feel sure that Mr. Pollock's further inquiries on the spot will help to throw light on the matter, so that satisfactory results may ensue and some form of compensation be made. It seems pretty clear that the affair happened without the knowledge, much less with the wishes, of the local Chief, as he has always been, as far as I know, on good time with the catechist."²¹⁹

In August 1924, the Divisional Officer of Bamenda wrote to Reverend Father Moran stating that, from the inquiries made, neither the chief nor the catechist could produce any evidence against a particular person to support a charge of arson. He concluded that he had "little doubt that the culprit is one

²¹⁸BNA- SD/A 1916/1 Memorandum Assistant District Officer, The burning of the church at Binka.

²¹⁹ BNA- SD/A 1925 /1Correspondence Father Moran to the Divisional Officer of Bamenda Division, September 3, 1924.

man whose wife has left him for the mission. The chief himself is by no means opposed to the Mission's activities. When I was in Babaji last 1922, he offered a site for the church."²²⁰ Peter Faye, catechist of Babadji and native of Kumbo, reported on the night of July 19 about 1 a.m. that the R.C Church was burnt down by persons unknown, but presumably people of the village of Babadji. Simon Wani, a teacher in the church, told him that the church was on fire. The fire eventually reached his house, which also burnt down. He lost one white helmet, one blanket, one sleeping mat, two pictures, ten cowries, one belt and one torch.²²¹

Disruptive Influence of the Missions on Traditional Customs

In the Bamenda Division, the Germans gave Protestant and Roman Catholic missions definite spheres of influence and the Catholics established their headquarters at Kumbo. During the war, the alien missionaries were naturally removed, but the mission was reopened in 1920 under Monsignor Plissonneau, a French subject. He was assisted by Father Bintner, who had been at Kumbo during the German regime and by Father Lebrun. Father Lebrun was replaced by Brother Zjezdzatka, a Pole. Before the return of European missionaries, several catechists had attempted to revive the Mission despite orders to the contrary. Tangwa, the Catechist, was arrested in 1916 for conspiring against the Fon, but released upon his promise of future good conduct. Branches of the Mission were later established at Tabessob, Djotin, Ngonzen, Nkawt and Mbiami within Bansa territory.

Only with assessment and reassessment reports of the Grass Fields were the officials able to grasp the magnitude of the situation on the ground. Christian missionaries were interested only in the conversion of souls, not in the turmoil this conversion could bring. Christianity has always been a destabilizing force and its introduction in the territory was no different. Colonial reports summed up the situation in the following words:

²²⁰BNA- SD/A 1925 /1 Correspondence Divisional Officer Bamenda Division to Reverend Father Moran, Kumbo.

²²¹ BNA- SD/A 1925 /1 Correspondence from Reverend Father Moran to Mr. Pallock, January 26, 1924.

“The introduction of Christianity into a primitive community where the pagan religion is the basis of the tribal constitution must cause a certain amount of bitterness, but this need only be of a very temporary nature. In Bansa, however, the trouble became very acute and prolonged. There were certainly faults upon both sides, but the Fathers in Kumbo, far from mitigating the situation with patience and tact, compounded the whole problem. Their previous experiences of direct rule in the Belgian Congo and under the German regime were considered to have rendered them unsympathetic towards the methods of Native Administration.”²²²

The Secretary for Native Affairs in his report on the Eastern Provinces was of the opinion that

“if the Missionaries would realize that among these primitive peoples the basis of all their tribal organization was reverence for the ancestor and the consequent respect that must be paid to that ancestor’s direct descendant and that there was nothing inherently wrong in such ideas and if further he would adapt his teaching to suit the conditions that exist among these tribes, he would be a more valuable asset in civilizing these backward people than he is at present. This question strikes at the very root of the Missionary problem in Bansa and a constructive form of Christianity can surely restrain from unnecessary intolerance of pagan rites.”²²³

Secondly, the emancipation of women from their state of domestic slavery was bound to come with the progress of civilization, but the attempt to precipitate this by the missionaries, in total disregard for societal equilibrium, undermined tribal organization before it has time to adapt itself to the transition. Thirdly, the custom of scattering Missions under imperfectly educated teachers, condemned by the Secretary of Native Affairs, had a very bad effect in the territory. Some of the villages affected were scarcely visited by the missionaries. Sudden contact with a negative Christianity tended to cause disintegration in the tribal setup. The evidence of

²²² BNA- SD/A 1923/1File no. 851/1922 Bansa District Bamenda Division Assessment Report by Mr. E.G. Hawkesworth, ADO 21st November 1922

²²³ *ibid*

a Christian teacher in charge of a Mission, taken on oath, showed how narrow minded imperfectly educated teachers could sound. 'If I had a child, I should flog him if he tried to attend a pagan church, but pagans should allow their children to come to the Mission as ours is the true religion.' This was the same view expressed by several missionaries who, true to the thought of the time, saw Christianity as the only true religion and the rest as being under the influence of demonic forces.'²²⁴

The Birth of Christian Villages

The strife and discord between Christians and their kinfolks who had remained rooted in the ways of their ancestors gradually prepared a stage for a new phenomenon - the Christian village. Shisong Christian village was created as a result of a myriad of factors. Unsympathetic colonial authorities and virulent traditional authorities arrayed themselves against a zealous, uncompromising native Christian population. In this situation, it was impossible for indigenous Christians to live peacefully with their kin. Duncan fanned the conflict into alarming proportions. He was an atheist who found an ally in the traditional authorities and sought to implant his belief against Christianity in Shisong. He teamed up actively with the traditional authorities to inflict suffering on the Christians. At that time of the persecutions, the traditional authorities enacted laws that made it impossible for Christians to live in their familiar environment. Left with no other option, Shisong became their only safe haven. From all villages, Christians and the catechumens were driven to Shisong. They were not allowed to leave Shisong and mingle among the ranks of non-Christians. It was an internal exile, reinforced with quarantine measures. The Christians steadily and patiently waged a moral fight.

With the Christians out of their reach, the pagans retaliated on the children of Christians in several cases. A father would not recognize the marriage and reception of his son into the church and would visit his enmity on the children of his son.²²⁵ The District Officer decreed that all Christian leaders be arrested. The soldiers marched to Shisong. Arriving during Holy mass, they waited until it was over. As soon as the Father gave his blessing

²²⁴ Ibid

²²⁵ Lafon

on the worshippers, names were called out and people put in chains and marched to Kimbo. But the surprising thing was that the Christians, remembering the suffering of the Church martyrs and the words of Christ, sang a mbaya song and, taking the chains in their hands, threw them around their necks with joy. The soldiers were bewildered. The rest of the Christians intoned this song to give them courage.²²⁶

In Sov, they arrested the catechist John Maimo and brought him to Kimbo. From Mbiame came Joseph Tar in chains. He humbly accepted the ill-treatment meted out to him. He had only the consolation of a catechumen, Peter Nsame, who followed him and took care of him by giving him food at night. The Fon of Mbiame had banned this new religion from his Fondom. He accused Joseph Tar of causing disquiet in the country. Peter Nsame, who helped him, later suffered the same fate. Father Doona's article, "How Christianity came to Mbiame," paints a gruesome picture of the scene.

"But before that day, that is during those six months of exile, something very pathetic happened to Peter Nsame, which we must record. There he was in exile in Shisong depending on strangers for his food, with many catechumens from other areas undergoing instruction there, food supplies ran short. The only course open to Nsame was to venture on a food foraging trip to his hometown. This he did and entered his house in Mbiame under cover of darkness. But his arrival was carefully monitored and [a] report [was] sent to the Fon of the area. Within an hour there was a knock at his door, he was dragged outside by juju and beaten till they thought he was dead. While the juju regaled themselves with palm wine, Nsame crawled to a head of ashes and buried himself in them. Refreshed by palm wine, the juju sought out the supposedly dead body to dispose of it. But search as they might, they did not find Nsame. When the juju had gone away, Nsame started out for Shisong, dragging his broken body over eighteen miles along a bush path, which was the only connecting link between the two areas in those days. Somehow, he managed to get to Shisong. With very special care from the missionaries, he recovered completely in three weeks. But he was left with a permanent mark- the juju had removed four front teeth."²²⁷

When all the Christians had assembled in Kimbo, Divisional Officer Duncan told the pagans that religion was nothing and that in Europe not

²²⁶ Ibid

²²⁷ J. Doona How Christianity came to Mbiame (unpublished) in op. cit...

many people frequented church. On one occasion, he took a bunch of matchsticks and told the pagans that, if they were united, they would crush the Christians in no time. As a soul brother, he advised them not to be frightened by the trousers and shirts the Christians were wearing²²⁸.

The Trial and Conviction of Paul Tangwa

A lot has already been said about the activities of Paul Tangwa and his rise to prominence in the early Christian community of Nsoland. In 1916, he became the central character in the fight between Christians and traditional authorities. Colonial reports about Paul Tangwa present him as a vile agitator, whose zeal for the Christian course had no bounds. However, missionary reports present Paul Tangwa in a different light, as a man of rare virtue. Because of these divergent views concerning Paul Tangwa, his trial and his sentence, an equitable judgement about his personality is blurred by the prejudices of those who reported on it for different reasons and from different vantage points.

In 1922, Paul Mbiybe Tangwa was sentenced to three years imprisonment by the Bansa court on February 9, 1922, according to mission reports. However, in a telegram from the Divisional Officer of Bamenda to the Resident in Buea, dated 2/3/22 and read on 4/2/22, Duncan said, "Tangwa was not sentenced at all at present." It added that "it was a mistake on the part of the clerk Francis Tunga who appears non compos mentis. While Fong investigating case, Christians armed by spears and cudgels severally wounded Fong's chindas when in execution of their duty. Am holding investigation and will report. All quiet at Bikom. Tangwa native of Kumbo, Duncan."²²⁹

Major Ruxton had some idea of the calibre of person Duncan was and was keen to advise him to be careful to comply with Nigerian law. In reply to Duncan, Major Ruxton said, "Am conducting of affairs strictly according to Nigerian Criminal code. Am calling all local District and Village Heads in for general enquiry into the cause of Mission trouble. By Nigerian law, I cannot

²²⁸ Lafon op. cit./ p 71

²²⁹BNA- SD/A 1922 /1Telegram from D.O. Bamenda to Resident Bea dated 2/3/1922 read 4/3/22File No. 487/21 Date registered 9/12/21 subject R.C Missions Adamawa Missions Minutes or instructions

take evidence enquiry on oath without government sanction. If Father demands official commission of inquiry, I will wire you but I think that they would prefer no inquiry at all.”²³⁰ On March 14, 1922, in a telegram from Monsigneur Plissonneau to the Resident in Buea, Monsigneur wrote that four Christians were condemned to imprisonment by Duncan. This condemnation seemed not to have been in line with the laws in force as the Divisional Officer for Bamenda Division had appealed to Buea, challenging the inquiry made by Duncan. In a telegram he said, “Following from Kumbo on the 12th of March, translation begins. Following on events of 9th February, four Christians condemned yesterday to imprisonment by Duncan. I appeal to Buea if not to Lagos (2) situation such that I challenged inquiry made by Duncan and appeal to the Resident (3). Ask as to conditions of a commission of inquiry. Letter follows ends. In my judgement, inexpedient to force matters. If really necessary, could come in April. Ruxton.” Ruxton had no option than to come himself to Kumbo. This was following the report written by Monsigneur Plissonneau, which exposed the shortcoming of the trial and the imposition of the penalty. In a telegram from Monsigneur Plissonneau to the Resident in Buea on March 12, 1922, Plissonneau wrote, “Suite evenemenis 9 fevrier Kumbo quatre chretiens condames hier imprisonment par Duncan je fais appel Buea si impossible a Lagos. Situation telle que je recuse enquete faite par Duncan fais appel à Resident.”²³¹

The Official Colonial Views

In a memorandum from Duncan, Divisional Officer of Bamenda, to Monsignor Plissonneau on March 8, 1922, while referring to the case of Paul Tangwa, he drew attention to the differences existing between the English and French methods of trial. The colonial authorities adopted the English procedure, while Plissonneau viewed events following the French procedure. The difference between the French and English methods of trial was very clear and this had repercussion on the way trials of suspects were conducted

²³⁰ BNA- SD/A 1922 /1Telegram D.O. Bamenda to Resident Buea dated 6/3/1922 read 8/3/1922

²³¹ BNA- SD/A 1922 /1MonsignorMonsignorMonsignorMonsignor Plissonneau, Bamenda to the Resident in Buea dated 12/3/1922 read 14/3/1922

and the way suspects were held in custody. Whereas in the French Courts of Justice an accused is considered guilty until he can prove himself innocent, in English Law all accused are innocent until the evidence for the prosecution proves them guilty. Tangwa's case was tried under Section 332 of the Criminal Code of Nigeria, which by Proclamation had been made legal in the area of the Cameroons, which was under British administration. It reads as follows:

“Any person who, with intent to maim, disfigure or disable any person, or to do some grievous harm to any person, or to resist or prevent the lawful arrest or detention of any person:

i) Unlawfully wounds or does any grievous harm to any person by any means whatever; or

ii) Unlawfully attempts in an manner to strike any person with an kind of projectile or with a spear, sword, knife, or other dangerous or offensive weapon is guilty of felony and is liable to Imprisonment for Life.”²³²

It seems that Plissonneau wanted to draw some sympathy by contextualizing the whole case. But the Resident was quick to add, “I hope that you clearly understand that the case to be tried today before the Court is a specific charge and that therefore evidence directly affecting the immediate charge is only allowable. Any questions concerning the general conduct of the Native Administration or the Conduct of the Christian teacher will be a matter of separate inquiry and all evidence should be reversed until the inquiry takes place and kept quite distinct from the case now before the Court.”²³³

In a lengthy memo from the Resident to the Divisional Officer for Bamenda, the Resident was categorical. As for the disturbance he could do little to help; it was a question of delicate handling on the spot. He reminded the DIVISIONAL OFFICER that he was the officer responsible, but should be warned that anything like high-handed or injudicious action against the

²³²BNA- SD/A 1922/1 Memorandum from the Divisional Officer to Monsigneur Plissonneau, Bamenda, march 8th 1922

²³³ A copy of the Memorandum from the Divisional Officer Bamenda to Monsigneur Plissonneau, March 8, 1922.

Mission would receive no support whatever from the Government, however sound the arguments might be. For example, cumulative sentences of three years passed by a C grade court on a catechist, if the report was true, would never for a moment be upheld by Government.

The Resident noted that the two parties must live side by side, but he equally betrayed his sentiments for the Christians. In his opinion,

“the Christian will conquer the Pagan and these being the facts it were better to accelerate the Christianizing of the Native Administration than to attempt to resist. It was of no good hitting one’s head up against a stone wall, except in the case of a fundamental moral principle and the Resident do not see that evolution on the people on to a moral plane nearly resembling our which includes the emancipation of women. The process is unpleasing to all concerned, but so are the teething troubles of infants.”²³⁴

In a private letter sent to the Resident by Dr. Rice on the February 5th 1922, the Resident was glad to read that though there had been some disturbance in the mission field, the Resident remained optimistic “that these disturbances were of a passing nature and will end in a better understanding and more stable conditions on both sides”²³⁵

In a memorandum to Monsignor Plissonneau, Duncan, the Divisional Officer, regretted that further friction between the mission and the Native Administration had occurred and, in order that a better understanding might be arrived at, he proposed as soon as possible the transfer of the administrative officer from Kentu to Kumbo. With reference to the case of Tangwa, it was obvious that further evidence was required on both sides. The charges were against Native rather than English law and were to be heard in the Native Court before a Quorum of Chiefs having knowledge of the gravity of the offences.

The whole genesis of the case rested on one issue. The friction appeared to be caused by the method of instruction of females by native catechists. One wonders with hindsight if some other means of giving religious instruction to women, which would have been less open to misconstruction

²³⁴BNA- SD/A 1922 /1Memorandum from the Resident Cameroon Province to the Divisional Officer Bamenda March 3rd 1922

²³⁵ BNA- SD/A 1922/1 Memorandum from the Resident Cameroon Province to the Divisional Officer Bamenda March 3rd 1922

by the animists, could not have been found. In a draft letter from Mr. N.C. Duncan to Monsigneur Plissonneau the Divisional Officer said:

“I have already asked you to consider the advisability of abandoning the religious instruction of women until such time as a Mother Superior arrives, should you not see your way to adopt this suggestion, would it not be possible for native catechists to hold classes by day instead of at night? Fathers and husbands very naturally object to their young women attending night classes and in many cases sleeping in the compound of a native teacher. The regulations made in the Catholic Dioceses of Nigeria are very strict on this point. The doors of all churches and schools are locked immediately after Angelus. I regret the more the current impasse because during my eighteen years in Nigeria, I have never met with a similar situation but have on the contrary found that the presence of the Catholic Mission had a pacifying rather than a disturbing effect on the indigenes. Bishop Shanahan is a great personal friend of mine and we worked together at UDI (Onitsha Province) in the greatest harmony.”²³⁶

The report sent at the time of trouble stated that 210 starving converts had taken shelter at the mission site. By native law, it was considered the duty of the Fon to feed and house the destitute and instructions to the chindas to tell the Fon to provide suitable accommodation and food for them in their own compounds if their husbands and parents had refused to take them back were equally dished out by the colonial authorities to the Fon. In the light of the gravity of the matter, Duncan proposed coming to Kumbo, where a full investigation by himself or an assistant Administrative Officer, it was hoped, would bring about some compromise acceptable to all parties.²³⁷

²³⁶ BNA- SD/A 1922/1Notes from the first draft of the letter from Mr. Duncan to Monsigneur Plissonneau written on the 16th of February 1922. The final letter sent to Plissonneau on the same day had some sections of the initial draft omitted.

²³⁷ BNA- SD/A 1922/1Memo from Divisional Officer Bamenda to the Monsigneur Plissonneau February 16, 1922



Father Ternay on pastoral visit. Women remained at the core of the friction between Christians and adherents of African Traditional Religion.

Women remained at the core of the friction between Christians and animists. Here another woman named Limna, who was living in adultery with a teacher named Nsai, was sent back to Kumbo in the hope that Nsai might be induced to marry her if a divorce from her husband could be obtained. Sent by the Divisional Officer in the heat of the storm, the woman was willing to stay with her parents, but rejected her husband as repugnant.²³⁸ These Christian women surprisingly were not eager to returning to their compounds, even though the Fon's chindas were anxious to have them back. In fact, the chief, because of the imbroglio, was convinced that the converts preferred to live in the compounds of mission teachers in order to avoid their obligations to their husbands or parents.

²³⁸ /1Memo cit. Op 16/02/1922

Suggestion About Paul Tangwa's Transfer

With further riots between the Christians and the animist population, the situation became so volatile that it demanded the presence of an administrative officer in the vicinity of Kumbo at the earliest possible date. Because a lot hinged on Tangwa, suggestions that he should be transferred to another mission station became louder and louder. His transfer was perceived to be so vital because it was hoped it would bring a solution to the current impasse. According to N.C. Duncan: "Unquestionably, further evidence must be called in the case of Tangwa; should you be able to transfer him to another mission station. I feel sure that the present most unsatisfactory situation would be solved. It is possible that you are not aware that Tangwa's father in days gone by attempted to dethrone the present Fon and that in 1916, he was confined in military custody for combining religious teaching with German propaganda."²³⁹

Teacher Tangwa was formerly employed by the German mission. A warrant of arrest was issued against him on February 9, 1922 and executed by a Court Messenger. Teacher Tangwa took this warrant away from the Messenger and put it in his pocket. The warrant of arrest was in manuscript as no Native Court forms were available. The Native Court sat at Bansa every eighth day, being the Native week and was held in the Native Court House about a mile distant from the Fon's compound. The warrant was issued two days before the sitting of the Court (i.e. February 11, 1922). Teacher Tangwa appeared to have taken the warrant immediately to Father Plissonneau who went to the Fon's palace, accompanied by a large following of Mission men, but did not see the Fon. He then went to the clerk's house, which was near the Native Court.

The clerk explained that it was not Court day and that there were no members of the court to try the case. He indicated that it should wait until February 11, the proper Court day. The Father insisted, however, that the case had to be tried at once, stating that there were plenty of chiefs present in the Fon's compound and that, in his opinion, there was no question but that the crowd was influenced by the Father to induce the Fon to hold an immediate investigation. It is a well-known fact that a Whiteman could have easily influenced the Native mind. Father Plissonneau insisted upon an

²³⁹ Draft of Memo op. cit. 16'02/1922

immediate investigation or trial and after protest, the Fon complied with the desire. The Fon argued that, if an investigation was to take place, it must be held in the open and not in his house. By this time, according to the Father's evidence, some ninety Christians had assembled outside the Fon's house in the public square where the investigation was held. Many of the Christians were armed with spears and cudgels, the latter hidden under their clothing.

The Fon drew the Father's attention to the large gathering and indicated that some were armed. He noted that it was strictly against Native custom to carry arms in the Fon's presence, especially when engaged in his official capacity. Before the commencement, the clerk, instructed by the Father, arrived in the public square and took down the depositions on a piece of paper not in the court book.

During the investigation one of the mission men, Serem, spat on the ground before the chief, which was an insult punishable by death according to Native law. Serem's father was an aspirant to the Fonship and Serem was the nephew of the present Fon. The Fon warned him that he would deal with him at the close of the investigation. It seems that Paul Tangwa and Serem's parents had some axe to grind with the chiefs. The new dispensation offered these progenitors of people who had had some trouble with the established Native Authorities ample space and leverage to vent the spleen, which their parents could not have done in the old dispensation.

According to the Father's evidence, the Fon asked sixty Headmen what they thought about the case, appearing to have the impression that they were the jury. They expressed their opinion that Tangwa should be sentenced to imprisonment for seven years. The Fon was of the opinion that was "It is good to put him in prison for three years followed by deportation"²⁴⁰. The Fon spoke aloud, so that all could hear and then went into his house. According to Monsigneur Plissonneau, he saw four wounded: two pagans and two Christians. On the other hand, he stated in his evidence that he went into the Fon's house immediately in an attempt to arrest Serem, remaining there some seven minutes and that he saw no fighting whatever. The Divisional Officer. concluded that, "although we have conclusive evidence that the Fon gave orders for Serem to be brought before him, the Father

²⁴⁰ BNA- SD/A 1922/1Memorandum from the Divisional Officer, N.C. Duncan, Bamenda Division to the Resident Cameroon Province March 28th 1922, concerning the situation at Kumba Bansa

states that when he asked the Fon whether he had sent for Serem, the Fon said he did not.”²⁴¹

From the analysis of the case based on the evidence from both parties, it was concluded that there could be no question that Serem’s apprehension by the court messenger was forcibly and successfully resisted by the Christians. Nor can there be any question but that the Christians, without lawful provocation, threw spears and did everything in their power to resist the detention of one of their community. With this intention, they also wounded some of the Fon’s Native Administration staff. The Father himself said that the Fon did everything in his power to quell the riot and it would appear that the Fon, under the most difficult circumstances, exercised the greatest tact and forbearance consonant with his considerable dignity as Fon of Bansa. He also took every possible precaution and made every effort to keep the peace. “Although there may have been some technical irregularities in the procedure of this investigation, these were entirely caused by the Father’s insistence that an immediate investigation should be held in spite of the clerk’s explanation of the rules as to court day among other things. The whole procedure, according to the Divisional officer, could not possibly be interpreted as prejudice on the Fon’s part against the Mission community to which he had previously and repeatedly shown his friendly interest.”²⁴²

With reference to Plissonneau’s letter concerning sworn evidence at Tabessob from the Christians and Animists, it appears that the “Dju-Dju” the Father referred to were the Fon’s native police. Numbering two only, they arrived at Tabessob on the evening of February 9 at 6:30 p.m. and gave directions to the Mission teacher to close the school and to disperse the men and women to their compounds in order to avoid similar riots to those that had taken place at Kumbo that day. Instead of carrying out the Fon’s instructions, this community, after digging up their farm produce, went to the Kumbo mission.

With regard to the flogging of the Christians at Tabessob, numbering forty to fifty, the majority of whom were grown up men, it is hard to believe that the two Fon’s police, armed, according to the Christian evidence, only with small twigs, samples of which were produced by the Christians, could flog or do any material harm to so many men. The case of two hundred

²⁴¹ Ibid

²⁴² Ibid

starving refugees seeking protection in the mission compound were in fact mostly villagers, who had returned to their villages to collect food that evening. It has been the Fon's constant complaint that the Christians, instead of living quietly in their own villages and going daily to the mission, were forming a politico-religious settlement, causing domestic disruption and constant complaints from the fathers and husbands of the converts. There was no need, therefore, for the Father to take any responsibility as both the Fon and their families were only too anxious to welcome them home.

With regard to the case in the provincial court, the Father was present throughout the trial at a table and took down notes of the evidence. At the beginning of the case, all witnesses except the Father were segregated. On the second day, however, the Native Court clerk, Francis Tunga, one of the most important witnesses, appeared to have been seen inside the court and Father Plissonneau raised an objection on that ground to him giving evidence for the prosecution, although his evidence for the defence was not objected to by the court on the same grounds. At the end of the court proceedings, the Divisional Officer sentenced Serem to five years imprisonment as he was considered the instigator of the disturbance, although he did not actually throw a spear into the Fon's compound. The remaining three accused were sentenced to one year's imprisonment.

At the conclusion of the case, Fathers Plissonneau, Lebrun and Bintner were invited to a meeting of the chiefs with a view to coming to some compromise whereby the reasons for the unpopularity of the present mission might be discussed and every effort made to terminate the constant friction. For this purpose, some forty Fons from all parts of the Division were present. On the following day, Monsigneur Plissonneau indicated that he was unable to attend although he had already promised to do so. The Native court was closed and six police were set aside to guard the Fon's life. The Divisional Officer returned to Bamenda.

In reply to the report from the Divisional Officer of Bamenda Division, the Resident said, "from my office it would appear that Tangwa is not persona grata with the Fon of Bansa and the ruling people."²⁴³ He found that Tangwa arrived at Kumbo in May 1916 and started work against the express wish of the chief. The late Mr. Podevin actually arrested him in 1916 for

²⁴³ BNA- SD/A 1922/1 Correspondence from the Resident to the Divisional Officer , Bamenda Division 1922

engaging in German propaganda as his predecessor Mukong had done. The latter was sentenced to 6 months imprisonment by the Divisional Court in April 1916. In December 1920, Tangwa is said to have occupied certain grass buildings built by him, not on mission land, without the chief's permission and these buildings were set fire. On December 15, 1920, Mr. Hunt saw the people of Kumbo in the matter of burning of the buildings and as to complaints of ill treatment of Christians. The people said that they had no objection to a mission, but that they resented interference with their womenfolk who were enticed to Fumban by Christians. Mr. Hunt took all necessary action and on January 18, 1921, Mr. Hunt received receipt for compensation paid. From January to August, the Resident found entries of several complaints from both sides, chiefly in the matter of women. It was quite evident from the entries on record that Mr. Hunt did not consider that all blame rested on the side of people. The Resident concluded that "Since August last year, complaints from both sides have multiplied, the motive in most cases being women. In November, 25 women were produced by Tangwa at Mr. Duncan's request and returned to their husbands or guardians."²⁴⁴

Whether the events described above are accurate in every detail is a matter of little moment; what is of consequence is that the Mission seem unable to carry on their work without giving rise to friction, brawls, incendiarism and 'women palaver'. Under British administration, the chiefs and people possessed a considerable amount of self-determination; they could not be coerced into accepting a teaching that they did not want or into giving sites or building houses. They were further provided with courts, established by law, in which native law and custom were administered under supervision. Such being the case, the Resident decided that no buildings were to be occupied by the Church and no teaching was to take place outside the concessions granted to the Mission by the late German Administration at Kumbo and Bikom. The Resident concluded that the Divisional Officer had the perfect right to order the closure of any chapel not situated on land duly granted to the Mission if he feared a disturbance of the peace.

²⁴⁴ Correspondence from the Resident to the Divisional Officer , Bamenda Division 1922

The Resident added, “first, that the Native Court could order the arrest of any native domiciled within its jurisdiction and, second, that there was nothing illegal in the President of the Court sitting alone, though it might not be advisable to do so. As to the charges that appeared to have been pressed against Tangwa, they appeared to amount to the lawful ones of seducing the people from Native Law and custom and inducing them not to obey the chief who was duly recognized by Government; whereas a convert should be the very first to pay deference to the sentence passed, which may also be perfectly lawful. The Resident saw the arrest of Franz Sem to have been ill chosen at the time. The brawl that took place was much to be regretted. Missions must win their way through discretion and without causing such an amount of disturbance.”²⁴⁵

Monsieur Plissonneau Petitions the Resident

After the sentence had been passed, Plissonneau brought the matter to the attention of the Resident. According to him, the events leading up to the trial all started in December, 1920 with the burning of the church in Kumbo by non-Christians. The trial and sentences were based on false evidence. It is thanks to him that we know what charges were brought against Tangwa.

« Au début de décembre 1920, trois semaines avant que je vinsse me fixer ici, la chapelle de KUMBO fut brûlée par les païens. Mr. HUNT est venu sur place examiner l'affaire et appliquer les sanctions qu'il a jugées nécessaires. Depuis, le calme a régné : pas le moindre trouble, pas de bagarre. - Ce pendant, depuis le passage de Mr. Duncan à KUMBO, en novembre dernier, nous avons pu observer une effervescence qui n'a fait que s'accroître à notre endroit, dans le milieu païen. A quelques heures d'ici, Mr. Duncan a condamné un catéchiste à un mois de prison et 100 marks d'amende. Personnellement, je le crois innocent et victime de basses calomnies, car il faut vous dire que ce catéchiste est le frère de

²⁴⁵Correspondence from the Resident to the Divisional Officer , Bamenda Division 1922

Tangwa dont je vous parlerai plus loin. Depuis ce jour, la chapelle est restée fermée : ce fut la première!”²⁴⁶

According to Plissonneau, the trial of Paul Tangwa did not follow due legal procedure. “Le dossier va à Bamenda. Mr. Duncan décide de faire recommence ce procès, mais cette, fois sous une autre forme: je ne suis pas qualifié pour savoir si elle est ou non régulière. Le 9 Février, Tangwa est donc de nouveau arrêté à la Mission, Cette fois, le tribunal se compose du seul chef de Kumbo, accusateur et juge. Devant lui, il y a ses “bigman”, à sa droite les interprètes et le Clerc du Native Court qui fait le secrétaire. La séance a lieu sur la place du Chef. Trois témoins sont cités à charge, aucun pour la défense. C’est d’ailleurs bien inutile! Tangwa est condamné d’avance!”²⁴⁷

He concluded by extolling the virtues of Paul Tangwa. According to him, Paul Tangwa was a man of rare virtue. A man of rare calibre. “Tangwa est un chrétien d’une rare vertu. Simple, sans ambition, incapable de nous désobéir, il est surtout coupable d’être très dévoué à la Mission et à son œuvre. Comme la majorité des chrétiens de Kumbo lui doivent leur instruction religieuse et leur baptême, il est incontestable qu’il est très aimé d’eux. L’inique sentence dut donc faire une profonde blessure dans le cœur des chrétiens.” According to him, the authorities caused the commotion that led to the violent dispute between Christians and non-Christians, not the Christians. It was the arrest of Franz Sem that led to the disturbances, not the Christians.

«Cependant, les débats se terminèrent sans le moindre incident: pas un cri, pas un geste, ni de la part des païens, ni du côté des chrétiens. Les gens commençaient à se retirer dans le calme, lorsque le Chef eut la malencontreuse idée de faire arrêter Franz SEM, au milieu du groupe des chrétiens, à trois ou quatre mètres de moi. Ce fut l’étincelle qui fatalement, dans de semblables circonstances, devait mettre le feu aux poudres. Un certain nombre de chrétiens et de païens en vinrent aux mains. Il y eut une courte bagarre de 5 à 7 minutes. Je fus assez heureux de pouvoir, avec l’aide

²⁴⁶ BNA- SD/A 1923/1Correspondence from Monsigneurr Plissonneau, Prefect Apostolique Kumbo to the Resident march 17th 1922

²⁴⁷ BNA- SD/A 1923/1Correspondence from Monsigneurr Plissonneau, Prefect Apostolique Kumbo to the Resident march 17th 1922

de quelques païens, dégager un chrétien qui gisait à terre et était frappé avec la dernière violence. Il y eut 4 blessés: 2 païens, plaies saignantes sans gravité; 2 chrétiens dont l'un a une blessure profonde au crâne. Il ne nous a pas été possible de le faire transporter à la Mission.²⁴⁸ »

Joseph Lafon provides details from a different perspective than that of the church or the state. According to him, when the catechists had been assembled, all the Fons from around were summoned to Nso palace to call an end to Christianity. They came from Noni and Nsungli. John Maimo, catechist in Sov, related how he was brought and how, because he was a prince of the Nso palace, he could not be thrashed. In total, they arrested and imprisoned 32 and the catechist, Paul Tangwa, was banished on March 8, 1922. He had an added punishment in that he was exiled and asked not to set foot in Nso after his punishment. But surprisingly and to the great annoyance of his persecutors, he was soon back. Joseph Tar was released after two months when another District Officer replaced Mr. Duncan.

When things did not work, even with the help of the new Divisional Officer, the pagans prepared for war with the Christians. This time the Christians were under heavy guard. The people of Nwerong Society lighted fires all over the Town lest any Christian escape unnoticed. Soon, a violent fight broke out because some Christians were selected and asked to go into the inner chambers of the palace. No one knew what was going to befall them there. The Christians resisted with force and a violent struggle ensued. As the fight raged on, a big fire was made in the palace, which Christians claimed would be used to burn some of them alive. The tense situation was only diffused when four smart Christians of the royal lineage took spears and walking sticks and threatened to shoot if the people were not released. Threatening in this way, they moved out with a battle cry and hid themselves in Shisong for the night. The following day, they found themselves on the way to Foubam.

This day, which was a Waylun, has remained in the minds of many as a climax of the persecution of Christians in Nso. Later, the four men listed above were forced to come back from their voluntary exile in Foubam to be imprisoned in Bamenda. Reverend Father Binther was already in Shisong

²⁴⁸ BNA- SD/A 1923/1Correspondence from Monsigneur Plissonneau, Prefect Apostolique Kumbo to the Resident march 17th 1922

at this time as Superior of the missions. To complete the picture, some women were maltreated at this time because they refused to get married to pagans. In the memo to the Resident, Plissonneau concluded by stating what he saw as the real case against Paul Tangwa. Tangwa's condemnation was an attempt to get the better of someone who seemed to have outwitted them. The paying of a fine incensed them completely and the condemnation of Tangwa became a *fait accompli*. "Now, if you ask me why they have a grudge so against Tangwa? I think that these "big men," who were condemned by Mr Hunt to pay a fine and to be imprisoned for the burning of the old chapel and of the houses of Tangwa, wish to be revenged upon him. And upon all the Catholic mission of Kumbo: because most of the aforesaid charges concern not Tangwa as he is a Native of Kumbo, but as a teacher of R.C Mission the success of which they try to clog and prevent. It stands neatly out both the trials of the 19th January and 9 February to which I was attending."²⁴⁹

Despite the hair splitting and venting of spleen, Plissonneau finally came to understand that he was under authority himself. In his letter, after much sober reflexion, he was able to say, "I have the honour to acknowledge your letter of January 31st 1922. I am glad to know the Governor General's instructions with regard to Mission sites. As soon as it will be possible to me, I shall endeavour to regularize the situation of my Mission sites. With regard to the chapel at Kumbo, which the chief had (yet) authorized me to build, I shall remove it as soon as I shall have finished covering the Mission's house whose roofing is now down. Now I have the honour to draw your attention to the situation, very serious, of the Catholic Mission of Kumbo. On the 9th February, Tangwa was condemned by the chief to be imprisoned 3 years. I was present to the trial, with authorization of the chief. In the name of justice and civilization, I protest energetically against an arbitrary condemnation. I cannot imagine that the Divisional Officer may approve and sanction it. The charges are mere calumnies and only witnesses for the prosecution were heard. When you will try this case yourself, I hope that you will request my own testimony."²⁵⁰

According to Plissonneau, the trial "was quite done and no small tumult neither of the side of pagans nor of Christians was made. Then when the

²⁴⁹ BNA- SD/A 1923 /1Monsieur Plissonneau to the Resident 1922

²⁵⁰ BNA- SD/A 1923 /1Monsieur Plissonneau to the Resident 1922

people were beginning to retire, the chief has had the ill-advised and very inopportune idea to order Sem, a Christian, to be arrested, for an old palaver.” It was the attempt to arrest Sem that sparked the trouble. Under the circumstances, this arrest infallibly put fire to the powder: some pagans and Christians fought for five to seven minutes. Two pagans and two Christians were wounded. Then the dju-dju went through the town, beat and expelled the Christians out of Kumbo and Tabessop. They cannot return to their own houses wherein most left their properties and so many men, women and children became refugees at the Mission, without food or quarters”.²⁵¹

Major Ruxton had no alternative than to come to Kumbo and see for himself what Duncan had said. When Ruxton arrived in Kumbo, he discovered that Duncan had ceased to be a neutral broker and had taken sides with those who wanted Christianity crushed. In his first days in Kumbo, he wrote, “I have now been here for four days and find the situation not at all as you have described it to me. I cannot help thinking owing to ill health a too great and misdirected zeal on behalf of native Authority you have allowed yourself to be misled by the Fongs of Bikom (a strong man) and Kumbo (a very weak) man and vacillating one. Naturally the pagan chiefs and big men do not like the mission”²⁵²

The first quarter of 1922 seems to have been the most troublesome period in the history of the church in Kumbo. With the problem in Shisong settled in the second quarter of 1922, calm returned to Kumbo. For example, the second quarterly report of 1922 read, “Since your settlement of the mission problems, there have been no further developments. Monsigneur Plissonneau arrived in Bamenda on the 29th of June, on his return from Mamfe Division and left the same day for Kumbo.”²⁵³

Charges against Paul Tangwa

In a letter to the Resident, Monsigneur Plissonneau outlined the charges against Paul Tangwa and summoned every ounce of his energy to show how baseless the accusations were. Tangwa was accused of building a chapel

²⁵¹ BNA- SD/A 1923/1Monsigneurr Plissonneau to the Resident 1922

²⁵² BNA- SD/A 1923/1Resident to Duncan Kumbo April 10th, 1922

²⁵³ BNA- SD/A 1923 /1Extract from Bamenda administration report for Quarter ending 30th June 1922 in M.P. No. 665/22 section 18, miscellaneous : Mission

without the Fon's permission. According to Plissonneau, Tangwa was to be interrogated. Plissonneau came to Kumbo on October 2, 1920 and found a small chapel, too small to contain all the converts (about 200). It was this chapel which the pagan had burnt, with 4 houses and the whole property, in the first week of December 1920. But, if Tangwa had built this chapel against the chief's advice and without his consent, Plissonneau could not understand why the chief had waited for so long (3 years) before making a complaint against a church teacher. In 1920, Mr. Gregg came to Kumbo. In 1921, Mr. Hunt visited Kumbo on two occasions. Plissonneau could not understand why the chief had remained silent in his contacts with the Divisional Officers. At the time of writing the letter, it was already 13 months since the church was burnt down.

Tangwa had been accused of building a chapel without the Fon's permission. For Plissonneau, the new chapel in no way was Tangwa's work and, therefore, he could not be held responsible. The chapel was the work of the missionaries. Therefore, Tangwa could not incur any responsibility. For Plissonneau, "It should be very unjust. Before we built this House, I went myself to tell the chief that I was desirous of building a house at Kumbo in order to teach catechism and prayers, for the people which get no time to go to mission. The chief quite agreed, made no objection and even he helped us with giving bamboos, grass, etc. Now, how can the chief charge Tangwa with this building, which Tangwa made not, but which the chief has helped to build?"²⁵⁴

The third charge brought against Tangwa was unlawful custody of the Fon's chindas. However, according to Plissonneau, there were chindas in the mission. But they came of their own volition without the slightest coercion on the part of Tangwa. "Yes, some chindas come to mission. But Tangwa took them not by strong, he called them not; they sleep not in the house of Tangwa or in mission compound, but in Kumbo. They come not to learn the doctrine for the sake of Tangwa, but the sake of God only and because they

²⁵⁴ BNA- SD/A 1923/1 Minutes of "Jugement de Tangwa au "Kingplace" de Kumbo, le 9 février, 1922". Written by J. Plissonneau Prefect Apostolique de Adamawa. He attempted to explain to the Resident what he believed was the truth about the trial of Paul Tangwa. para.

desire to receive Baptism. Elsewhere, this case was already tried by Mr. Duncan with Father Lebrun, in his last journey at Kumbo.”²⁵⁵

Christianity could not co-exist according to its creed with some traditional practices that were considered abhorrent by the Christians. It was a natural consequence of their conversion to consider as repugnant all that was superstitious. It was natural that the charge against Tangwa concerning his preaching against these practices featured prominently against him. What the missionaries did not see was that Christian teaching, for which Tangwa was only a mouthpiece and propagator in a specific context, naturally aroused suspicion and hatred. Tangwa was accused of dju-dju medicines. Plissonneau strongly defended Tangwa. “When Tangwa teaches the converts that they must believe not the pagan superstitions, he makes his true duty, he makes like the Fathers and all the other teachers, because the Catholic Doctrine ought to fight these superstitions, at least in the mind of the converts. In that matter, if Tangwa is guilty, we all also are guilty. If Tangwa troubles the pagan people for their own beliefs; if he affronts the native religious beliefs he do bad. But he did not anything.”²⁵⁶

The introduction of Christianity in a community obviously upset the balance of power. The power dynamics brought in its wake problems inherent in such a change. The Fon naturally must have viewed the advent of this new partner in the power dynamics with disdain. Catechist and later priests wielded so much power that the sovereignty of the Fon could not remain the same. The charge against Tangwa, concerning this erosion of powers previously ascribed to the Fon, was not new. Plissonneau defended Tangwa against such a charge vehemently. He went on to say, “If I must believe the chief, it is true that his people hear not him; he told us so, many times for many things, for many works. But this people is pagan people: if he obey not to the chief, it is no matter of Tangwa who stop at mission all times, never walks to Kumbo, unless on the market day, to see his father ... Since thirteen months I live here, I never heard some complaint from the chief, against the converts, or that he has punished or imprisoned someone because they want not to obey to the Fong! Elsewhere, here is the doctrine which we and Tangwa, teach daily to the converts: “We no get only for hear for we father and mother, we must hear too for we bishop, Fathers Gobria,

²⁵⁵ Ibid. Para. 7

²⁵⁶ Ibid. Para. 4

King and other people weh them commandia we.” (Extract from the bush-English Catechism No 197). We teach the same doctrine, for lamso-tongue.”

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Christianity gave deadly blows to some of the rituals which were seen as necessary for the survival of the crops. The fertility rites usually performed during the month of May to ensure fertility were part of the package Christians had to abandon. These rites were seen as essential for a bountiful harvest. It is natural that Tangwa was accused when natural phenomena associated with these rites did not occur at the expected time. Rains in the Grass Fields may not follow a predictable pattern and time every year. However Tangwa was accused of controlling natural phenomenon to the detriment of the tribe. “It rains”: the guilty is Tangwa. “It rains not”: the guilty is Tangwa. “The crops are bad”: the guilty is Tangwa, etc.”²⁵⁸

Tangwa seems to have almost been considered a supernatural figure, capable of every conceivable evil under the sun. Apparently there were no bounds to his mischievous activities. He was accused of putting the Fon’s wife in the family way. It is true that some of the Fon’s wives had become pregnant in the missions. It was a phenomenon not limited to Kumbo. Tangwa could not possibly have become so decadent. Alternatively, Tangwa might have been accused because he was responsible for regulating life in the mission compound. Even if Tangwa was not involved, the crime was committed in his area of jurisdiction and his lack of proper supervision provided some grounds for criticism. “Some Fong’s women are reported to be in the family way: already, some people whispered: ‘The guilty is Tangwa.’ I astonish very much that this matter has not yet become another charge against Tangwa. Never did the chief’s women come to doctrine; never did Tangwa go into the compound of these women. How may it be possible that Tangwa is guilty in the matter?”²⁵⁹

Another charge against Tangwa was that he sent 18 men and 6 women to Fouban. Monsieur Plissonneau categorically stated that it was all lies. “Lies and calumny when they tried this case in the Native courts of Kumbo on January 19th, this calumny was so obvious, so evident, that the chiefs did not condemn Tangwa. Why? Because the 18 men were present at the trial!

²⁵⁷ Ibid

²⁵⁸ Ibid. Para 6

²⁵⁹ Ibid. Para. 7

They were the best witnesses to prove the falseness of the charge. These 18 men did never go to Bamum, always they were living in Kumbo, as any man knows. And so, this charge proves copiously the ill faith of the plaintiff. “Le Chef accuse Paul d’avoir envoyé à FUMBAN (territoire française) 6 femmes et 18 jeunes gens. Malheureusement pour l’accusateur, les 18 Jeunes gens qui n’ont jamais quitté Kumbo, sont présents à l’audience. Après une séance de 4 heures, devant l’innocence évidente de Tangwa, mais par respect sans doute!! Pour le Chef de Kumbo présent, le tribunal décide qu’il ne peut statuer”²⁶⁰.

However, Plissonneau admitted that 6 women had taken refuge in Fouban. “It is true: some women fled and took refuge into Bamum. I regret it. I had myself drawn the attention of Divisional Officer, to some similar cases, by letter of November 13th 1920.

Now, some of these 6 women were recently interrogated by Divisional Officer, at Bamenda. I do not know what they replied, but I know that they are unable to affirm, truly, they were sent to Bamum by Fathers, or Tangwa. Tangwa is a teacher at Kumbo. He has no power to send some convert to another mission. And since he is a teacher at Kumbo, why does he send his people elsewhere? Tangwa knows that these women cannot receive the Baptism in Fouban, because the father of that mission does not know the matrimonial situation of these women”.

In the trial of February 9, 1922, I heard the following: “Tangwa sent some women to Bamum where they are taking Baptism; after they come back to Kumbo, then their husbands cannot more approach them. LIE! I affirm expressly that only one Bansa woman has received Baptism in Fumban, on the 24th December 1920: Maria Bengu, daughter of Nyang and married to Petrus Desenne (kingboy) on the 4th April 1921, in Kumbo, with favourable advice of the Fong, whom I consulted myself.”²⁶¹

Like the teaching against fertility rites, condemnation of polygamy became another accusation against Tangwa. “I heard also, ‘Now we take only one woman.’ Yes, the Catholic people can marry only one woman. Any catechist ought to teach so to the converts. If Tangwa is to be condemned for this teaching, all the teachers and all the fathers must be condemned also. Why the pagan people complaints about that matter? It is however obvious

²⁶⁰ Ibid. Para. 10

²⁶¹ Ibid

that less the converts will take women and more the pagans will be able to marry.”²⁶²

A lot has been said about the role of Tangwa in a resurrected church after the departure of the missionaries at the beginning of the First World War, how Tangwa reconnected with the missionaries in Fouban and the missionaries finally came to Shisong. Tangwa was accused during his trial of inviting the missionaries to Kumbo against the wishes of the Fon. “Tangwa has called the Fathers here, against the Fong’s advice. It is false! Before the war, the PREFECT Apostolic converts only in these parts of Cameroon, which is now the British Cameroon. After the war, when I was sent by the order of Rome, to take again the prefecture of Adamawa, deprived of all his Missionaries, since 1915, then of all the former properties of the R.C.M, I found the only house of Kumbo. As soon as I have been able to come to live in Kumbo I came. I did not so because Tangwa called me, but because I had at Kumbo, a mission, whose right of property is absolutely guaranteed by the Article 438 of “Traite de Versailles.”²⁶³

It is mentioned in colonial records that Tangwa’s parents had harboured plans of dethroning the Fon. Tangwa could have seen the power dynamics in the new dispensation as a way of bringing to fruition the ambition of his Father. Plissonneau had a very different view and saw the accusation as out of place. “Tangwa wishes the Fong resigns in order to take his place. Now, there is the plot. Whoever knows properly Tangwa must laugh hearing such a stupid invention. Tangwa is not an intriguer, a plotter: He is a good Christian, serious, devoted and obedient, without ambition or pretension. I know him, better than anybody. Tangwa is innocent. He is the victim to abominable calumnies.”²⁶⁴

In conclusion to the memo to the Resident, Plissonneau stated what he saw as the real case against Paul Tangwa. Tangwa’s condemnation was an attempt to get the better of Tangwa, who seemed to have outwitted them. The paying of a fine incensed them completely and the condemnation of Tangwa became a *fait accompli*. “Now, if you ask me, “why they have a grudge so against Tangwa? I think that these “big men,” who were condemned by Mr. Hunt to pay a fine and to be imprisoned for the burning

²⁶² Ibid. Para 8

²⁶³ Ibid

²⁶⁴ Ibid Para. 9

of the old chapel and of the houses of Tangwa, wish to be revenged upon him. And upon all the Catholic mission of Kumbo: because most of the aforesaid charges concern not Tangwa as he is a Native of Kumbo, but as a teacher of R.C Mission the success of which they try to clog and prevent. It stands neatly out both the trials of the 19th January and 9th February to which I was attending.”²⁶⁵

According to Plissonneau, “the trial was quite done and no small tumult neither of the side of pagans nor of Christians was made. Then when the people were beginning to retire, the chief has had the ill-advised and very inopportune idea to order SEM, a Christian, to be arrested, for an old palaver. It was the attempt to arrest Sem that sparked the trouble. This arrest in the circumstances, inevitably put fire to the powder: some pagans and Christians fought for five to seven minutes. Two pagans and two Christians were wounded. Then, the dju-dju went through the town and beat and expelled the Christians out of Kumbo and Tabessop. They could not return to their own houses wherein most had left their properties and thus many men, women and children became refugees at the Mission, without food or quarters.”²⁶⁶

The Kumbo Crisis in Retrospect

In 1924, after the turbulent years of strife between Christians and non-Christians, the colonial administration could, with hindsight, evaluate Christianity in a different light. The Divisional Officer Bamenda wrote at some length:

“The old prejudices against the Mission appear to be dying down, though it is still strong in those chiefs affected personally by its operations. At Banso, however, after the stormy era of 1921-22 a high degree of harmony has been attained between the two seeming incompatibles - the Native Administration and the foreign church. For the introduction of a foreign faith would seem to be an obstacle to the natural and gradual evolution of a stable Native Administration and in this respect the Northern Provinces have the Immediate advantage over us in the conservation of muhammedanism to the practical exclusion of alien institutional religions. For there can be no doubt

²⁶⁵ Ibid

²⁶⁶ Ibid .Para 6

that a foreign religion is disintegrating in its influence and that it tends to diminish the power of the chiefs. The woman problem has been discussed ad nauseam. But there is also the chinda question. By native custom, a chief can choose any boy to be his chinda (member of his household) and refusal was unknown till the missions came. Now a boy will sometimes refuse to continue in his office, either on the ground (possibly self-righteous) that the chief tells him to do acts repugnant to the Christian teaching or on the plea that chief does not give him enough spare time to attend doctrine. In the eyes of the chief, treated in this way, 'doctrine' is as bad in its effects as is reputed to be the teaching in communistic Sunday schools in England in the eyes of the churchman and Tory. It is not that the teaching is actually seditious, but the consequences are frequently factious. The congregation with its catechist becomes an imperium in imperio and the members thereof look to the catechist as their leader rather than to the chief. This has happened at Bikom and is happening at We. The church sometimes becomes a refuge for the lazy and, when the congregation consents to communal work; it seeks to do it as a congregation and not as one with the rest of the people"²⁶⁷.

The same annual report expressed doubts about the genuine motives of conversions of natives to Christianity. It states clearly that:

"The cleavage is also illustrated by their attire, for as soon as a boy professes Christianity, he almost invariably discards his picturesque tribal costume and assumes the Western Christian's shirt and trousers. It is a pity the missions do not discourage this. The root causes that urge the pagans here to become Christians are worth examining. They cannot be purely religious causes, any more than the mass movement of the untouchables in Madras towards Christianity is religious in the full sense of the term. In India, it is a revolt against the social tyranny of caste, but here it is difficult to diagnose. Perhaps it is felt to be, in part, the emancipation of youth, or it may be a revolt against the social tyranny of polygamy. The immediate cause of Christians to move into Shisong was the persecution of the Christians by the non-Christians".²⁶⁸

Bernard Fonlon paints a moving picture of the persecution. Surprisingly for him, the infant, leaderless Christian Church proved too strong for him. A

²⁶⁷ BNA- SD/A 1922/1Annual Report, 1921: Cameroons Province p.9

²⁶⁸ BNA- SD/A 1924/1Annual Report, 1924: Cameroon Province, pp.9-10

leader sprang up amongst them in the person of Mbiybe Fontem, known later as Paul Tangwa. Mockingly surnamed Tangwa Bah-Njav, he rallied the bewildered neophytes around him, inspiring them by word and example with new courage and determination to keep the Christian faith alive. The Fon obviously was not prepared to tolerate such an open and menacing challenge to his regained authority: arrests, scourgings and locking up became the daily lot of the Christians. The effect of all this was borne by Tangwa Bah-Njav. Indeed, if the Interregnum between the German expulsion and the setting up of the Franco-English condominium had lasted long, blood would have been shed and some would have died for Christ among the Nso clansmen.

It was then that a new phenomenon emerged – partly owing to the fresh memory of persecution, partly due to the anxiety of the Missionaries to keep their converts confined and protected from heathen adulteration – the creation of Christian villages. The Shisong headland from which the former inhabitants had been ousted had ample space. Zealot neophytes, especially those from prominent families, whose fury had been fieriest, flocked to the priests and before long, numerous villages sprang up around the traditional missionary trinity of church, school and mission-house.

Quite apart from the converts' longing and need for a haven beyond the reach of hostile kinsmen, the creation of Christian villages was pursued by the early missionaries as a proselyting policy. Obviously not every section of the pagan community was aggressive towards the Christian kith, nor could all the converts find room eventually in the village since the ultimate goal was the conversion of the entire community. The logical rider or consequent to the Christian village policy was that of cultural apartheid. The missionaries infused and instilled into the minds of the neophytes the idea that native customs and institutions – or *pagan fashion* as they called the whole of them – were idolatrous and, therefore, sinful. Obviously, no one who had sincerely converted could partake with a clear conscience in certain native practices. However, no one made a careful study of the nature and purpose of the institutions and customs to distinguish the wrong from the right. Thus, the situation arose where Christians frowned on even such harmless things as native music and dances. Where Christians lived among their own relatives, they painstakingly refrained from participating in the cultural life. The children could hardly resist the thrill of the rustic xylophone or the enthralling beauty of the rhythm and the measures of dances. For fear of their parents, children did not dare to become anything more than excited

onlookers. In Shisong, where cultural isolation was reinforced by physical apartheid, it did not cross the mind of anyone to introduce even the most harmless of these institutions.²⁶⁹

Furthermore, this Christian village was completely withdrawn from the Fon's control; the only effective authority there was that of the priest. The *nwerong* or *kwihfon*, the embodiment and executor of chiefly power, revered and feared throughout the Nso country, risked being unmasked and beaten up if he set foot in Shisong.

"There was a song in my childhood days called "Shisong she Fon she Kwenni she Nyuy" or "This Shisong, once of the Fon, now is of God." Such were the beginnings of evangelisation in my part of the country. Early missionaries seemed to believe that it was necessary to create a cultural void in order to build a sure, secure and solid Christian edifice. To men so dedicated, who braved the wild unknown to plant the cross and spread the Word, it appeared *a priori* dangerous to concede that there was anything in African culture on which to build a genuine Christianity. Their ardent zeal and candid fervour led them instinctively to dump the whole lot of it as pernicious. If one made a concession, however innocent, one could not know where it would end. The convert must be voided and washed clean and shorn of the mind he had inherited from his heathen ancestors. Today protagonists of African culture bitterly inveighed against this policy. Was this policy right or wrong? That is a pointless quarrel; each policy or philosophy or institution must be put in its historical context and judged in the light of the *Zeitgeist* in which it prevailed. The essential thing is that these were men of total dedication, who shrank from no sacrifice. Their faith was deep and their sincerity was transparently unimpeachable. They were received with open arms and deep affection, even sought out by many. Further, their system, mistaken or not, produced results of lasting, sterling worth",²⁷⁰

In the Christian village, daily Mass and Communion became the centre of life as a matter of course. There were protracted community prayers in the morning and evening and doctrine classes for children and catechumens at dawn and dusk and once a week for the young and the grown-ups. There were weekly confessions and extra religious knowledge classes daily on the school timetable. The Angelus rang out thrice daily, at break of day, at noon

²⁶⁹ Fonlon op. cit.

²⁷⁰ Fonlon op. cit. p 7

and at sundown and everyone stood where he was to commemorate the Incarnation of Christ. The intention was to create a pure and genuine nucleus for the infant Nso Christianity, sequestered and sheltered from heathen contagion, immersed and steeped in the new religion and enlivened by a vigorous, unfaltering, unswerving, uncompromising Catholic faith. This was an undying principle intended to make the Christian community burgeon and bloom. Moreover, such it promised to be, for this young community was notable in its single-minded dedication, fervent faith, stern but joyful puritan spirit - a redoubtable spiritual task force for the reduction of the surrounding heathen citadel.

“Looking back and thinking of what I have seen tramping through the world, I have a strong feeling that some of those early votaries of the Christian church in Nso would be serious candidates for canonisation if Rome were interested in the lives and the virtues of that nameless, faceless, faithful band, fast disappearing into the limbo of unrecorded history. Furthermore, the children born and bred in this community grew up, more often than not, into men of sterling virtue, with a high sense of responsibility and discipline. This Christian village of Shisong, due to its physical and cultural isolation, became a veritable piece of foreign territory in the heart of Nsoland. The children born and bred there, but for ties of kindred blood and language, were as good as foreigners, since they had little or no contact with their ancestral villages. Some of the parents of these children, like those of the future Bishop, came from the most prestigious and topmost families in Nso, namely the Fon and Faay Ndzendev”.²⁷¹

The Ravages of Small Pox in the Christian Village

About Easter of the year 1922, when all Christians had to be in the mission for the paschal celebrations, an epidemic of smallpox broke out amongst the Christians. Some Christians who had gone to trade in kola-nut in Yola, Northern Nigeria, brought it to Shisong. Many Christians, unfortunately, contacted this deadly disease and Paul Tangwa was one of them. A camp was made in the forest near the present orphanage where father Bintner cared for the sick. The Fon sent food, which many Christians wrongly suspected was poisoned. Providence had it that anyone who escaped

²⁷¹ Fonlon op. cit.

from Shisong and went to his village was attacked by the disease and brought back in shame. In all, the sickness took the lives of 28 Christians. Catechist Thomas Ngo tells how he was attacked by the sickness on his way back to Bande. He tells how the Bande people connived to kill him after the discovery of the disease and how he escaped in disguise by the mercy of God. After some time, he got through the sickness²⁷².

Further evidence about the epidemic came from the memorandum from the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, to the Resident in Cameroon. Among other things, Duncan said, "I think the Medical Officer will find that smallpox is generally throughout Bansa villages and the Nsungni country and so unto Kentu. It was first reported in Bansa six months ago or more and Dr. Mckay did extensive vaccination there."²⁷³ Major Ruxton, the Resident, arrived at Kumbo on April 8, 1922 and according to him, "The M.O. arrived today. small Pox is confined to the Mission and they have some thirty cases. There have been several deaths. There are no cases outside the mission for all cases that declared themselves in Kumbo have been relegated to the Mission. I have ordered the Fong throughout the M.O to supply provisions and firewood. The death rate has been very heavy, but no fresh cases have declared themselves within the last two days."²⁷⁴

The Transitional Years: The Departure of French Sacred Heart Fathers and Advent of Mill Hill Missionaries in the Grass Fields

There was so much trouble that the missionary activity of the French Fathers was lost in the confusion. It was really a trying time for the Nso Christians having to go through all the persecution. Seeing the needs of the people, the French Fathers studied Lamnso thoroughly and made some attempt at the introduction of a Pidgin English catechism instead of one in Lamnso. Whatever prompted the introduction of the Pidgin English Catechism in Nso by the French Fathers, who already had a good mastery of Lamnso like the German Father Johann Emontz, remains uncertain. It was

²⁷² Lafon op cit.

²⁷³BNA- SD/A 1923/1Memorandum No. 148/64/21 from the D.O Bamenda Duncan April 13th 1922 to the Resident in the Cameroons.

²⁷⁴BNA- SD/A 1923/1Correspondence from Major Ruxton to Duncan from Kumbo on the 8th of April 1922

not a monumental error, whose repercussions have hardly subsided. Monsigneur Plissonneau made a considerable study of the Lamnso language and he left behind some valuable vocabularies and translations in typescript. Among these papers a typed Pidgin English catechism was found.²⁷⁵ When Father Moran arrived at Shisong in May 1923, the earlier policy of using the local language was dropped and Pidgin English was adopted. By the end of the Twenties, the utter inadequacy and inefficacy of Pidgin English for Catechetics in the grasslands became evident for all to see. Consequently, Monsigneur Rogan demanded a change of policy. It was thus that translations of the Catechism, Prayers and numberless popular devotions were undertaken in Lamnso, Kom, Kijem, Limbum, Mankon and other languages in the Bamenda Grasslands. The Catholic Faith would never have made the progress it made in the grasslands in the Thirties and Forties were it not for that change in policy.

“Between 1931 and 1949, there was a very consistent policy concerning local languages as appears clearly in the Minutes and Resolutions of the Provincial Meetings of that period. The importance of catechetics in the local language was frequently stressed and it was also stipulated that every Father should endeavour to master at least one local language. Perhaps not many Fathers achieved this, but the Catechisms and Prayers in the local languages certainly achieved something as regards acculturation.

A study of the Minutes of the Provincial (or Vicarate) Meetings of the Mill Hill Fathers in the Thirties and Forties reveals that they were constantly aware that Pidgin, though handy in talking to people, was inadequate as an instrument for reaching the soul of the people. This led to the insistence on the necessity of learning at least one local language. The first German Fathers at Shisong were confronted with this problem. Monsigneur Plissonneau, author of the Pidgin English Catechism that was adopted in Prefecture Apostolic of Buea, admitted himself in his last Report to Rome that he recognised the inevitable superficiality that would result if local languages were not adopted for Evangelisation. It seems that the use of local language was gradually abandoned after 1950. It was argued that, since no one local

²⁷⁵ Robert O’Neil op. cit...

language could be used all over West Cameroon, the use of official languages in the Liturgy was a bad thing.”²⁷⁶

The Reopening of the School

The people distinguish the periods of missionary activity by the origin of the priests at the time. They refer to such periods as the time of the German Fathers or the French Fathers. It was now the time of the English or Mill Hill Fathers. Sixteen days after the Mill Hill Missionaries took over the mission, they baptized 19 catechumens. One, if not the only, condition for the acceptance of a candidate for baptism was that he had helped carry the Father's cargo to Dschang. We refer to the departing fathers. Those who had left the church during the time of persecution had their baptism delayed.

In May 1923, Father Michael Moran arrived at Shisong and Father William Bintner, a German speaking Luxembourger and a member of the French speaking Society of the Priest of the Sacred Heart, handed over the books to him and left for Dschang. This handing over took place on May 13, 1923. Monsigneur William Camping became the first Prefect Apostolic of Buea, now carved out of Adamawa. He began a familiarization tour of this prefecture and trekked as far as Bamenda.

The Annual Report of 1924 stated that:

“The most important event has been the taking over of the Roman Catholic Mission at Kumbo by an English Society known as “the Mill Hill Fathers” from the Adamawa Mission. Monsignor Camping appointed the Reverend Father Moran to take charge of Kumbo and he arrived there on May 11, 1923. The advent of an English Father has been welcomed by one and all and particularly by the Chief of Bansa, whose district is the stronghold of the Roman Catholic faith in this division. The Chief is a frequent visitor to the Mission and the most friendly relations exist between Father Moran and him. The Missionary and the Political service can undoubtedly help each other in their own spheres of work, but there is one point which should be impressed upon Christian and that is that it

²⁷⁶ Paul Verdzekov: The Language Problem in the Bansa Area

is essential that Christians, when wishing to voice their minor complaints, should not attempt to find a short cut to the political officer's ear through the Missionary, but should utilize the machinery of native administration. If this is not done, it is as often as not the root of petty disturbances".²⁷⁷



Mgr. John Campling, William Scully, Michael Moran and the Fon of Nso. Shisong-Kumbo, December 1923

Father Moran paid his first visit to Bamenda in June and arranged about a site for a Church. The first site selected was not suitable, but when he came again in November another site had been chosen and the Church built. The Church was on the high ground near the market place and it was within easy reach of the ex-Basel Mission Cottage of the Chang road, which may now rightly be known as the 'Vicarate'. On the completion of his work at Bamenda in November, Father Moran travelled to Chang to meet Father Scully, just arrived from England, who was proceeding to Kumbo Mission School. The school had been re-organized and improved by Father Moran in spite of financial difficulties and the lack of school materials. A grant to the

²⁷⁷ BNA- SD/A 1923/1 Annual Report 1924

school of thirty pounds to help towards the purchase of school materials had recently been approved by the Resident and a letter of thanks gratefully acknowledging that the amount was received from Father Moran. Besides the grant to the school and provision of materials, the Mill Hill missionaries were pleased to receive money from the Cameroons German Liquidation Fund. On June 10, 1923, Reverend Father Moran, Superior of Kumbo, Cameroon Province, received the sum of twenty pounds eight shillings and nine pence on Bamenda local treasury voucher no. 6, dated April 17, 1924, being the sum accruing to the Roman Catholic mission from the sale of gold and silver coins.²⁷⁸

Monsieur William Scully arrived in Shisong in 1926 and later left for Ossing to reopen the mission there. Father Leonard Jacobs, who also arrived in Shisong in 1926 after having worked in Soppo for one year, re-opened the Mission at Kom in 1927. On his arrival, he found 716 Christians and over 1200 catechumens. During the following three years, the priests baptized 2733 adults and 534 children in the Bamenda area.

The Mill Hill Fathers in Shisong

On April 10, 1923, Mgr. Campling informed Mr. Hunt that he had received a letter from Monsigneur Plissonneau informing him that he had been requested by Rome to withdraw from Kumbo. In the same letter, Campling was requested to appoint a priest to take over the parish. Father Moran was appointed to take over from the French Sacred Missionaries in Kumbo. In addition, Campling pleaded with Hunt to make available 16 carriers at Nkongsamba. From all indications, the French Fathers left in disgust. The French Fathers took away with them all they could possibly carry. They needed three hundred carriers to carry their supposed property to Dschang! Left behind were two tables, one chair, one knife and one cup! They took all the other chairs, including a carpenter's bench, all the European ploughs (introduced as an experiment) and an anvil. In fact, nothing was too heavy or too small to be worth removing. The removal of mission property from Kumbo left no one indifferent. The Colonial government was not indifferent. In a memo from the Divisional Officer of

²⁷⁸BNA- SD/A 1923/1Memorandum No. 277/57/1923, from the Divisional Officer, Bamenda Division, to the Public Custodian, Lagos, Nigeria.

Bamenda to the Resident in Buea, the Divisional Officer wrote, “I am informed by Mr. Hawkesworth, which is confirmed by Father Moran, that when Monsignor Plissonneau evacuated Kumbo he took away with him all the mission property captured from the Germans. No notification of the removal was received from Monsignor Plissonneau, but, as we are the custodians of the property, I feel compelled to report to the matter. I may add that 300 carriers were employed in transporting the property to Chang.”²⁷⁹

According to Frederick Migeod, who was ten days behind Michael Moran, they had three hundred carriers to move the mission effects and left only two tables, one chair, one knife, one cup and one fork. Nothing was too insignificant to carry away. However, the garden was intact. Monsignor had not dug up all the turnips and potatoes.²⁸⁰“ Later Father Moran wrote in philosophical terms, “there is one thing which they left behind which you will see when you come here and which we shall have every reason to be proud of and that is a grand people.”²⁸¹ According to Robert O’Neil, the story of the transfer of Kumbo mission to a lone Mill Hill missionary was told often by senior missionaries in the past.

Father Moran settled down in the Fathers’ house built by the Germans. It had an underground kitchen. The church of bamboos was still standing and in use. He then approached the Fon for school children as he was to begin an English School. The Fon sent 20 children of varying ages to the mission. One can say that it was not a formal school. It could be termed a Sunday School, since most of the teaching was of songs and religion. After the initial turbulent years, the situation experienced some slight improvement. With the passage of time, the Fathers could admit that:

“Things are going on very well here at Kumbo just now. Occasionally something comes up, but with a “tête à tête” between the chief and myself, things right themselves again. I suppose we can never hope to say check mate to the old burning question of “woman palaver”. The idea of

²⁷⁹ BNA- SD/A 1923/1Memorandum No. 280/64/1921, July 3, 1923, from the Divisional Officer, Bamenda Division, to the Resident, Buea.

²⁸⁰BNA- SD/A 1923/1 Frederick W. Migeod, *Through British Cameroons*, London, Heat Craton, 1925.

²⁸¹Mill Hill Archives Moran to Campling, June 14th 1923

the freedom of the woman is quite a new and unwholesome thing to most of the chiefs and until it is at least tolerated by them, we can never hope to have absolute peace. Scarcely a week passes without some complaint coming in from one locality or another, but I have got so accustomed to them now, that I can easily dispose of them. In any serious case, I can only rely on your help in the matter and if such a case comes up, I shall always let your know. Things are not exactly as they should be in Bekom, but I have been rather disappointed with the chief there, as he made very fair promises to me in the beginning when I visited him with Mr. Hawkesworth. We did our very utmost on that occasion to make things square and we came away with what we thought satisfactory results and the chief was apparently quite satisfied. On my second visit to him, he positively refused to see me, the reason being that the mission people did not come to join in the crying over his ancestors. I did my best to make him realize they would do anything else except that, because it was impossibility, but he could not see it and so things were left.”²⁸²

Father Moran had done his best to get the people to pay all the respect of homage that was due to their chief, but this was inadequate. In the words of Father Moran, this was of no use. The Fon of Kom remained intransigent. Father Moran could say after months of attempting to placate the Fon, “I am afraid that it is of little use until he realizes on his part, that the Christians can be peaceful and law abiding subjects of his. The Bansa Chief has long since realized this and I think that is the main reason why things are ever so much better here in Kumbo. However, we can only hope for the best and wait for time to wear out many of the old prejudices and in the mean time we can only carry on as best we can, till the eventual time arrives when they will realize the mission to be blessing and not a curse. In the few lines, I think you have a fairly good résumé of how things have been since I took over Kumbo from the French Fathers over a year ago.”²⁸³

In Bamenda, there were already 40 churches and 4296 baptized and learners as compared with 24 churches and 2219 adherents in 1922. The mission, however, had had its setbacks as two ‘bush’ churches were burnt,

²⁸² BNA- SD/A 1923/1 Father Michael Moran to the Divisional officer Bamenda Division.

²⁸³ BNA- SD/A 1924/1 Annual Report 1924

but in places hardly under full administrative control. The Bamenda Division seems to have been the only area where there was overt opposition to Christian proselytism and the cause maybe sought in the fact that only there were the chiefs powerful enough to be affected materially by the propaganda against polygamy.

Roman Catholic Mission School, Kumbo

The building that was in use was a large bush-house capable of holding over one hundred boys. The foundations of the old German brick building were still in good form. Father Moran's intention was to rebuild the structure with sun-dried bricks. He was of the opinion that the scholars could easily make these and that the only expenses to be anticipated were the wages of bricklayers for two or three months. The total number on the books was put at 105 and the average attendance was 75. During farming season, the number of students who attended school declined considerably, weekly attendance being substituted for daily.

The school materials available at the time were as follows: 4 school benches, 1 black board, 1 easel and 80 African readers I, II and III. The readers were in a very dilapidated condition and there with no immediate prospect of their being replaced. The timetable for the school was as follows. School hours lasted from 7:30 a.m. to 1.p.m. The subjects in the curriculum were arranged as follows:

Monday, Arithmetic, Reading, Dictation, English Grammar

Tuesday, Reading, Moral Instructions, Hygiene

Wednesday, English Grammar, Arithmetic, Reading

Thursday, Moral Instruction and Ethics, Dictation, Arithmetic, Writing

Friday, Arithmetic, Reading, English Grammar, Writing, Manual Labour

All the boys at this time were day scholars and the average age was rather high, but both matters could easily be adjusted. It was thought that it would probably be possible to collect school fees of about 3d. per month. The teachers employed were James Lingog of Bansa and David Omodi of Onitsha and each of them had completed standard IV in the Roman Catholic Mission schools of Calabar and Onitsha respectively. Their wages were 1/6 per week as compared with £3 and 15/per mensem of the N.A. Scribe and

Messenger respectively. Despite the meagre salary, Omodi stayed on with the hope that Government assistance could give him an adequate salary. The Fon of Bansa at the time visited the school regularly and was very anxious that it should receive sufficient support in order that it might develop along the same lines as the other schools in the Division. He was also of opinion that it might bring together the pagans and the Christians.

Father Moran applied for assistance, stating that he found the intellectual receptivity of the Bansos considerably greater than that of any other clan of the Division or indeed higher than that of any tribe he had encountered in the province. It was also significant that Bansa Catechists were also in great demand. Father Campling went ahead to discuss the question of the Government schedule with the Resident and the only concession asked for at Kumbo was that the school buildings could be used for religious instruction after school hours. The demand for a school was as great at Bali or Bikom and in every discussion of Native Administration the Fong often returned to his original request that the first benefit might be bestowed upon Bansa.

The financial strain was bearing heavily upon mission funds, necessitating curtailment of educational activities in the coming year. The mission recommended strongly that the giving of some sort of assistance be considered. The news from Father Moran that another missionary was on his way to Kumbo in order to ensure adequate European supervision was a welcome boast to the staff, the government and the Fon. Until such time as the Education Ordinances were applied the resident was quite prepared to authorise money grants and grants of school material to approved Mission Schools. The Victoria Native Administration had provided for £100 under Head XI, item 6 of the year's approved estimates. The manager of the Tiko Protestant mission school received a grant of £3 a quarter and was helped with material.

In the case of the Kumbo Mission School, the Resident had approved a grant not exceeding £30 for the current financial year being made to the Manager under Head XI, item 5 of the Bamenda Native Treasury Estimates, but as the manager had omitted the item "Grants – in – said to approved schools" in the next year's Native Treasury Estimate, the Resident was unable to authorise a regular grant – in – aid. Hawkesworth's at the same time intimated that a grant could grant the government some rights over schools. However, the Resident was clear that a grant gives no rights to Government or Native Administration over Mission buildings. In the June

quarterly report, 1923, the question of the Mission schools being put on the list of assisted Mission Schools was referred to the Director of Education. "There is no doubt that the enterprise and keenness displayed by Father Moran in restarting the school should be recognised by the Government and the grant of sum of money to provide school materials, pay the salaries of the teachers would be most acceptable. I would suggest £30 as a reasonable amount. The school would always be open to inspection by the inspector of schools and can be made to conform to the demands of the education code."²⁸⁴

The same report added that:

"If the Director of Education will not approve of a grant, would it not be possible for the Native Administration to contribute from its funds? A special item would have to be inserted in the estimate which no doubt could be arranged. The dogma that any education is better than no education has always proved most dangerous when applied to primitive communities. It is essential that a sound moral education idealizing citizenship should be introduced to counterbalance the disintegrating effects of a tag of intellectual education tacked in to mere doctrinal instruction. In short, the necessary painful period of transition from obscure paganism to a comparatively enlightened state is being unduly prolonged in this district and as the Native Authorities have been extraordinarily accommodating in all other spheres, all evidence tends to show that the fault lies mainly with the Christians. The Basel Mission has performed valuable work in the Southern part of the Division with comparatively little friction and as the nature of the native is peculiarly attracted to the rites of Roman Catholicism it is hoped that the Roman Catholic Mission will soon confine itself to the incalculably valuable part it can take in the civilization of this District."²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ BNA- SD/A 1923/1Memorandum No. 470/57/1923, E.G Hawkesworth, Assistant District Officer, Bamenda, to the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, October 29, 1923.

²⁸⁵ BNA- SD/A 1923/1Memorandum No. 470/57/1923, E.G Hawkesworth, Assistant District Officer, Bamenda, to the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, October 29, 1923.

Soon after Father Michael Moran had taken over, Father William Scully adopted every possible method with the hope that he might bring back the fallen Christians. One method, in those days termed “German”, was to arrest people and give them the thrashing of their lives. He brought “independence and freedom” to the Christians as the Christians were now emboldened by the pagans’ fear of Father Scully. Father Scully’s activities drew critical comments from the authorities, right to the Resident and Monsigneur Rogan. An extract from the June report by the Divisional Officer, Bamenda Division, devoted a section to Scully’s activities.

“An elder with his family went to make a native sacrifice. Father Scully and some Christians came and the Father kicked the sacrificial offering. The elder declared that this happened on his own land. Father Scully, who admits the action, assured me that this was not correct. Even if the native crossed on to mission land, a more courteous and respectful example of Christian toleration might have been displayed.” The comments of the Resident against such obnoxious behaviour were clear, “With regard to Father Scully’s action and the native sacrifice, I take a more serious view than you do. His action was not a question of tact, but a definite breach of section 204 of the criminal procedure code, which states: “Any person who does any act which any class of person considers as a public insult on their religion with the intention that they shall consider the act such as an insult...is guilty of a misdemeanour and is liable to imprisonment for two years.” He went on to add that the Article 7 of the mandate also provides that the “the mandatory shall ensure in the territory complete freedom of conscience and the free exercise of all forms of worship which are consonant with public order and morality.” The Resident saw that Father Scully’s defence – that the act occurred on mission land – would not in any case be valid unless the other party had knowingly crossed unto mission land. This correspondence was forwarded to the Monsigneur Rogan with a subtle statement to “take any steps in your power to prevent a recurrence of such action.”²⁸⁶

The Christians who still remember Father Scully say he was a very tough man. In 1926, he was appointed to Ossing in Mamfe. He was only there for a short while before closing down that mission completely. He then sent word to Father Jacobs in Shisong to send 300 carriers to transport all his property

²⁸⁶BNA- SD/A 1923/1 Confidential from the Resident to Monsigneur Rogan No. C.16/1929

back to Shisong together with his curate Herman Bots. This was in 1927. He is said to have been sent away from the country because he would not stop flogging the “bush black monkeys”. The carrying of cargo by Christians from Douala, Soppo, Nkongsamba and Mamfe reached a peak during his days. No sooner had one come back from this trek than he would be called to go again on another with almost no food money. In that same year, 1927, Father Francis Woodman took over the school and rearranged the curriculum and the classes. He did not stay long for in 1928, he was sent to Njinikom.

New Infrastructural Projects in Shisong

In 1929, the school was transferred to a new brick building at the old demolished doctrine house. The feast for the ordination of the first Cameroonian priest, Aloysius Wankuy, was conducted here in 1949. One of Father Scully's high points was that he built a nice church in 1929, which was declared by the Government in 1967 to be an antiquity and a national treasure. Nonetheless, the parish Priest of Shisong stubbornly demolished it in 1970, in spite of the fact that the late Dr. Bernard Fonlon, then Minister of Health and Lafon, then a Member of Parliament, approached him to leave it alone as government had voted some money for its repairs and renovation.

Father Scully worked on this church day and night. He zincked it, blessed it on the feast of assumption in 1931 and dedicated it to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This was the evening before he finally left. While the church building was in progress, the schoolhouse served as a church, which was later turned into a doctrine house.

Soon after father Scully had left, someone arrived who was going to transform the mission, Father Francis Figl. It is no exaggeration to say that father Figl left an almost indelible mark on the church in Nsoland. Soon after his arrival, he built brick houses for widows and these widows gradually became part of the mission. Though opposed by many of his brother priests, he brought in Sisters when his Lordship, Bishop Peter Rogan, endorsed the request and visited the house of the Franciscan sisters in Tyrol, Italy.



Mill Hill Sisters and M. Nabben, A. Schmid, L. Onderwater, G. Roosendaal. S. Staats, I. Stokman and Mgr. Rogan- October 1931

As soon as the Franciscan Sisters had settled down, he helped start a vocational school. This occasioned the following complaint by the Fon in a letter to the Divisional Officer, dated December 15, 1935. "Since the beginning of this year, many of my wives have run to Catholic Mission Shisong and there are 10 at present in the mission. I beg to advise the Father Superior to return my wives or we shall never be in terms."²⁸⁷

²⁸⁷ Lafon Op cit



Bishop Peter Rogan

Father Figl arranged to have the catechist school transferred to Shisong from Njinikom. Father Anton Schmid, the teacher of the catechists, came along. As Father Figl was a hunter, he hunted animals to help supplement the diet of the catechist school with good beef. The girls in the vocational school cooked for the catechists. Father Figl considered vernacular schools a priority for learning English. In these vernacular schools, grade one pupils learnt to read and write in their mother tongue before transferring these skills to English in grade two (known as infants two). The aim of this programme was to make it easier for illiterate children or adults to learn to read and write English, or any other language, by starting with their mother tongue. Before the children commenced reading English, they were taught oral English. For his programme, Father Figl, a born teacher and philosopher, advanced the following argument: in the beginning pupils do not speak English and, thus, have to accomplish three new tasks at once if taught to read straight away in the English language.

From education-oriented projects, the missionaries turned their attention to economics. A viable source of income was not the lot of the Nso People. People had to leave Nso and go to Northern Nigeria where they could trade in Kolanuts. Father Figl discouraged this trade, preferring agricultural activities based on scientific methods. In order to buttress the point, he

ferried in from Dschang a good quantity of coffee seeds. He demonstrated the techniques of growing coffee through a nursery garden. The plant was introduced to villages by Christians and family heads. This brought to a halt the trade in Kolanuts to Northern Nigeria. Instead, Nigerians came to Kumbo and bought the commodity themselves, especially the Hausas and Ibo people.

Father Figl equally advised Christians on having double rooms in their houses for the sake of privacy. He taught them how to make baby cots of bamboo and wood and discouraged nursing mothers from lying in the same bed with their child, which might hurt the child. He took pains to inspect these arrangements on his night visitations when the family was always together. He strengthened the tradition of family prayers. Further, he asked Christians to identify their houses with the sign of the cross at the door for easy recognition. Having seen Kumbo people trekking daily to Shisong for Holy Mass, Father Figl wanted a church to be built in Kumbo that would, in the future, serve all. In this move, he was extremely foresighted.

He wanted this idea realized immediately. He approached the Fon for a plot at Bamfem, where the Presbyterian Church stands today. The Fon gave it to him, but afterwards withdrew the permission. Just within that year, the government transferred its quarters and rest house to a new site. Therefore, he strove with all his might to get the old government plot, a place popularly known as the Kimbo Daily Market Square. His report dated April 20, 1938, on the plan for Kimbo Town mission reads, "There are 1142 Christians in the town, too much trekking, so much so that many were leaving Kimbo and setting in Shisong. I have been here for five years and have experience that no sooner have these people left than they become out of control from the elders and independent from civil authority. Since government is transferring to a new site, let this vacated place be given to the Catholic Mission."²⁸⁸

He did not wait for the answer. He made sticks, dug holes and put stones on the place. He then proposed to buy Lenjo's house, near the rest house adjacent to Faajang quarter, for use as a catechist's house. The government replied in the negative and he applied for another plot nearby. He was asked to remove all the stones and fill in all the holes he had dug on the old government plot before his request would be considered. This he did and was allowed the occupation of the site of the old mission at Yuwar Quarter.

²⁸⁸ Lafon op. cit.

He built a church house, a school and a fathers' house on the acquired plot and both the church and the school were put into immediate use. Next, he began a cattle farm to supply milk to the babies in the maternity. At first, he bought one cow, a calf and a bull. Before he left in 1940, there were already 40 animals. Before this, on January 12, 1932, the Fathers had wanted to make a contract with the government on the maintenance of the public road from Babessi to Mbot at the cost of 6 pounds per mile. This, they reasoned, would assist and stimulate movement and heighten economic activities and transport of produce to the main markets. The government had objected to this request.

With the assistance of his curates, Burke Kennedy, Anthony Schmid and Herman. Bots, Father Figl seemed to attempt too much within a short time. Nonetheless, under his direction quite a lot was accomplished during his eight-year stay in Kimbo. All this was before he was forced out, just as the German fathers had been expelled from Shisong and Njinikom during the First World War.

The Demise of the Christian Village

In the late 1930s, cracks began to appear in the fabric of the Christian village community of Shisong. This closely-knit community, which still had its heroes ready to pilot it into a new era, was certainly deprived of one of its leaders. The long career of Catechist Paul Tangwa, whose virtues had been extolled by the German Pallotine, French Sacred Heart and English Mill Hill missionaries, was suddenly terminated. For reasons best known to him, Father Francis Figl apparently got it into his head that Tangwa should be dispensed with. Father Figl, like all human beings, had his shortcomings. His anxiety to stay in Nso for as long as possible and to savour the taste of his own labour led him to overstep his bounds in connection with the sacking of Paul Tangwa, the pillar of the Christian community of Shisong. It will be recalled that Paul Tangwa was catechumen from 1915 until 1918 and he was not spared in the violent persecution of Christians and catechumens that broke out at this time in the Nso and Kom parishes, incited by the British District Officer Duncan²⁸⁹. Paul Tangwa was beaten up, harassed, and

²⁸⁹ According to Joseph Lafon in his book : A History of the Catholic Church in Kumbo Diocese(1912-1988) on the 24th endnotes of chapter Two, he writes that Mr.

arrested, imprisoned and, after serving a third term of imprisonment for his faith, exiled from Nsoland. In spite of all this, he became a strong and reliable catechist in the 1920s and after.

What had befallen Paul Tangwa, according to many should not have been contemplated in the first place. Within the ranks of the Christian community of Shisong and even within the clerical circles, Tangwa's dismissal was viewed with disgust. Mgr. Joseph Campling's letter to the Superior General of St. Joseph's Society for Foreign Missions at Mill Hill, London, written at Soppo, is self-explanatory. Mgr. Campling writes, "He is Paul Tangwa who was maltreated in the hands of someone we may consider an atheist, yet the very man was rudely terminated, not due to old age or inefficiency but on very weak grounds of suspicions."²⁹⁰ Father Figl apparently wished to stay longer in Nso and sensed that Paul Tangwa was someone of influence, who had presumably influenced the transfer of many priests from the parish. To consolidate his position, he moved to stop any intrigue Tangwa may have been contemplating. Paul Tangwa, who can be called a martyr in Nso even if technically he did not die a martyr's death, was thus terminated as a catechist. The termination agreement read as follows:

"The undersigned Paul Tangwa since 1920 a catechist in Kimbo Mission herewith acknowledges receipt of 11 pounds (eleven pounds) which sum he receives as a gratuity from the Rector of the mission with the approval of the Right Reverend Monsigneur Peter Rogan, Prefect Apostolic, in acknowledgement of his long service for the mission. The under signed fully understands that he has no further claim on the mission for any sort of support, either from the Rector of Kumbo mission or the Vicar Apostolic of Buea.

Signed: Paul Tangwa

Witnesses: 1. Figl

2. H. Bots

3. Schmid,"²⁹¹

Duncan is said to have returned to England where he later went mad. He is said to have been tied to a tree and to the dismay of everyone he ate his own refuse.

²⁹⁰ Archives Shisong

²⁹¹ Lafon, op. cit. p. 90

As soon as Paul Tangwa was terminated, the Rector of the Mission was forced out of the area by circumstances beyond his control. In 1939, war broke out in Europe and the fathers in Shisong had a hard time. Food rationing was enforced and the movements of the Fathers were restricted to an 8-kilometre radius within their station. The war took away Fathers Francis Figl and Anthony Schmid in 1940. The unexpected removal of the Austrian and the German left the mission vacant. Father Leonard Jacobs, who was parish priest in Njinikom, was appointed parish priest in Shisong, while retaining his former post of responsibility. His curate, Father Ivo Stokman, openly showed his disgust at such an anomaly. The other missionaries from Tyrol were treated with suspicion. Extracts from the Resident's inspection notes on the Bamenda Division towards the end of 1943 read, "I went to the R.C. Mission and met Father Stokman and the Mother Superior and two of the nuns, all Italian subjects with yearnings towards Tyrol, their own country. Dr. Jeffreys tells me that all these nuns are still being treated as enemy subjects and are not allowed to go more than a mile from the Convent. This is a technical rule that might well be relaxed now that Italy is out of the war - not that it would make any difference to the nuns as they never leave the precincts of the convent."²⁹²

After the sacking of Paul Tangwa, the next victims in line were the widows. When Father Ivo arrived in Shisong, he reopened the infants' school, which had undergone some modification following the introduction of the vernacular schools. Next, he embarked on buildings. First, after sending away the widows who were in the mission houses, he built the teachers' quarters. He used the bricks from these houses for his multiple building projects, which included a boarders' village in Tarshwer. Some fourteen houses in all, including the teachers' quarters, were constructed. Another visible sign of the Christian village, the Order of Widows saw their hopes dashed as necessity took pride of place over charity. What is not clear is whether these widows, evicted from the homes in which they had longed to spend their last days, were compensated or not.

²⁹² BNA- SD/A Extracts from the Resident's Inspection Notes on the Bamenda Division written by the District Officer Bamenda Division No. 1046.63A Buea 29th of December 1943.



Father Anton Schmid, with students of the catechist's school in 1949

Fr. Stockman seems to have been a schemer of a rare oddity. Owing to the lack of teachers to continue the catechists' school, he complained that the catechists were being over-educated and given doctrine that should only be taught to priests. He disbanded the school and planted a cypress forest in their football field.

He had contact with the government doctors in Kumbo General Hospital, now the Bansa Baptist Hospital. He invited one of the doctors to provide a medical examination of the girls in the Vocation School. These girls were greatly embarrassed and very unwilling to undergo such an examination, which amounted to an invasion of individual privacy. Unwillingly to stomach such a personal affront to their dignity, they had no other option but to leave the institute. That was the official closing down of the Vocation School. The Sisters were equally surprised and even tried to keep the school going without the support of the Paris priest. It seems

Stokman was sniffing for any scum to hang on to. He certainly had no intention of allowing the Christian village of Shisong to continue in its present state

The same examination was applied to the school and several boys and a teacher were dismissed. The Christians were bewildered. They prayed in silence for his removal, but without any open protest. He was very well aware that the Christians wanted him to go. To let them know he had come to stay, he built the Father's kitchen and wrote on the walls of this house the words, "Move here." The infamous kitchen stands there today with these very words. Many interpreted the words "move here" as a command that people should not come near the father's house, an interpretation that was not far from reality. One priest declared as much in Kimbo! In spite of all this, Christians still remember him today as one of the most energetic fathers that the mission had ever had, for he initiated projects. Was he simply a strategist who sought to accomplish his goals at any cost, or did he foresee the absurdity of trying to sustain the Christian village? Did he see that the present dispensation had outlived its usefulness and needed to be destroyed?

In 1946, Father Stokman applied for a lease on a two-acre lot for the new girls' school. This plot included the displacement of some indigenes. He paid these individuals a compensation of 40 pounds. On November 16, 1947, the foundation stone for the new building was laid. Father Leo Van Son built and completed the school in 1951. In 1947, Father Stokman wanted the leper colony in Kimbo, near the present daily market, to be handed over to the Shisong mission. He wanted to bring doctors and sisters trained for that purpose, who would provide regular supervision and ensure a regular drug supply for the treatment of the diseases. He told some of his Christians that this disease could easily be treated, that he wanted them in Kinkari where they could easily support themselves by planting food. The project did not take off.

Father Stokman was still in Shisong when Father Burke Kennedy was fortunate enough to stumble on a qualified and generous architect who helped the mission draw up plans. His letter, dated November 28, 1949, to Bishop Rogan from the Catholic Mission in Shisong speaks for itself. "There is minor miracle which happened in Kumbo the other day. Two Europeans came from Kaduna on leave to see beautiful Bamenda. One man, a Dublin

man named Prior and a good Catholic, the other a New Zealander, named McLaughlin.”²⁹³

The Ordination of Aloysius Wankuy

In the midst of the projects of Father Stokman came the ordination of the first son of the soil as if to crown his efforts. As soon as it became publicly known that a son of the then British Cameroons would be ordained as a Catholic priest, specifically one bred of the Christian village of Shisong – something which was absolutely unprecedented, even inconceivable according to some people – all the Christians of the Vicarate, from Bota and Tiko in the South to Ako and Sabongari in the North, mobilized themselves for that singular event. For example, Peter Mafiamba, a student in Calabar, travelled all the way to Shisong to be present at the event. Mill Hill Missionary Fathers from all parts of the Vicarate, Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mill Hill (Patricroft Sisters), Soppo and Fiango and thousands of Christ’s Lay Faithful all travelled to Shisong for the Ordination. Father Ivo Stokman, MHM, the parish priest of Shisong Parish, the Tertiary Sisters of Saint Francis then in Shisong and Christ’s Faithful of Shisong Parish, the venue of the event, duly prepared themselves for the Ordination. So unusual, even unimaginable in the minds of some people, was the very idea of a black man becoming a Catholic priest, that the pagan wives of the Shu-Fai Ndzendzev wondered aloud why the turmoil and demanded to know whether in Shisong “a black man would be made a Whiteman.” Up to that moment in time in their lived experience, Catholic priests were all white men and consequently, only white men could become Catholic priests.

Along with many of Christ’s Faithful from all parts of the Vicarate, distinguished Lay Catechists from all parts of the Southern Cameroons travelled to Shisong for Father Wankuy’s Ordination. These distinguished Lay Catechists included men such as Sango Mathias Effiem of Soppo, Sango Pius Epie of Baseng, Sango Simon Nguti, Joseph Takor and Ferdinand Ako of Okoyong, Mamfe, Martin Atang Andreas Ngongbi Andreas Ngah, Paul Mbiybe, Tangwa and many others too numerous to mention individually. These Lay Catechists, many of them Founders of large mission stations, were the men who, animated with an apostolic spirit, made an outstanding and

²⁹³ Lafon op. cit...

altogether necessary contribution to the spread of the faith and of the Church in the British Cameroons by their immense efforts. As the immediate and principal collaborators and auxiliaries of the Mill Hill Fathers, these Lay Catechists contributed immensely to the emergence of an indigenous clergy with the ordination to the Priesthood of a son of the Vicarate Apostolic of Buea.



Distinguished West Cameroon Catechists. Left to right: Paul Tangwa (Kumbo); Pius Epie (Baseng); Joseph Takor (Mamfe); Matthias Effiem (Soppo); Simon Nguti (Bojongo); Ferdinand Ako (Mamfe) At the ordination of Father Aloysius Wankuy, Shisong July 24th 1949.

That was the very first time in history that those words were heard in the then British Cameroons. And the person for whom Father Stokman was making that request was a Cameroonian, Aloysius Wankuy. Bishop Rogan had been waiting for twenty-four years to see that day. For Father Ivo Stokman, who personally addressed the ritual request to Bishop Rogan as

already mentioned, the ordination of Father Wankuy was the realization of his most cherished dream: the emergence of a local clergy, as demanded already in 1919 by the great Pontiff, Benedict XV, in his great Apostolic Letter, *Maximum Illud*. In fact, Ivo Stokman, who was already studying in a Diocesan Seminary in view of becoming a Diocesan Priest, was so completely overwhelmed in heart and mind by *Maximum Illud* that he became a Mill Hill Missionary in order to go to the Missions to work for the emergence of a local clergy in accordance with expressed wishes of Pope Benedict XV for whom he had the greatest veneration and about whom he frequently spoke to me as well as to many others. Many who knew Father Ivo Stokman at close hand will readily bear witness that his greatest passion was to work for the realization of the desires of Pope Benedict XV.

On the Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, July 24, 1949, Father Wankuy was ordained. On the following day, when Bishop Rogan celebrated the Ruby Jubilee of his own Ordination to the Priesthood, the Fon of Nso, Sehm III, was present. He was also present on Tuesday, July 26, 1949, when Father Aloysius Balon Wankuy celebrated his first Solemn Public Mass, *coram Pontifice*.

When Father Wankuy, the main Celebrant, lifted up the consecrated Host at the Elevation, an extraordinary reverential silence gripped the entire assembly, an atmosphere of silence, which evoked those words of the Book of Wisdom: "When Peaceful silence lay over all and night had run half of her swift course, down from the heavens, from the royal throne, leapt your all-powerful Word" (Wisdom 18:14-16). At that moment of the Elevation and in the midst of that extraordinary silence, something unprecedented took place. At a time when no one in the Vicarate Apostolic of Buea had ever heard of the word "enculturation", at a time when the very idea or notion of enculturation did not yet exist, one of the Fon's retainers spontaneously performed an act of enculturation that was immediately understood by Christians and Non-Christians alike. He blew aloud the elephant tusk, whose sound announces the presence of the Fon on exceptionally solemn public occasions. As the sound of that royal elephant tusk pealed through the skies when Father Wankuy lifted up the consecrated Host, the veteran Catechist, Paul Mbiybe Tangwa, bent down his head and wept profusely. That moment of the Elevation of the Sacred Host accompanied by the peal of the Fon's elephant tusk was, as he later told Bernard Fonlon at Okpuala, the climax of the three-day celebration. The sound of the Fon's elephant tusk, at that

precise moment of the Elevation, in the midst of that incredible silence of the liturgical Assembly, was for Paul Mbiybe Tangwa the signal that the Risen Christ, Immortal King of the Ages, had taken over the entire territory and people of the Southern Cameroons.



Bishop Jules Peeters and John Maimo- August 1962

In the Spring 1951 Issue of MISSIONS AND MISSIONARIES, a periodical published in England by the Mill Hill Missionaries, Father Daniel Doherty, who was an eye-witness at Father Wankuy's Ordination, began his description of the Ordination Ceremony with the following words:

"The sun is shining in Shisong'. Thus Bishop Rogan opened his sermon to the people, including forty Mill Hill Priests and Sisters, Government Officials and African Chiefs, gathered together in the open air for the Ordination of Father Aloysius Wankuy, the first Priest of the British Cameroons. The Bishop's opening words aptly expressed our own feelings of gratitude that God had blessed this day with such beautiful weather, because it was in July, in the height of the tropical Rainy Season. Perhaps this 'wonder' of nature helped the Africans to realize the wonder of grace they

had come to witness: the raising of one of their fellow countrymen to the Sacred Office of the Priesthood.”²⁹⁴

Father Doherty aptly and vividly described the intense feelings and emotions of the Cameroonians present at the Ordination in the following words:

“The moment came when Father Aloysius pronounced with the Bishop the sacred words of Consecration. ‘My Lord and my God’: Never had these words rung out with more touching and heartfelt devotion as the Sacred Host and Chalice were raised. This aspiration is said aloud by the people at the Elevation of every Mass in the Cameroons, but this was the very first time that it had been said when one of their own countrymen was celebrant. The Mass drew to its close with the voice of the newly ordained Priest mingling with that of the Bishop. Then after the Mass, when they saw their Bishop kneel for the first blessing of Father Aloysius, the people realized the great dignity he had received and they too crowded excitedly round him, many of them his personal friends, eager to get his blessing and to congratulate him. For them, it was a wonderful experience and brought home to them better than any instruction the fact that in the Church there is no distinction of colour or race. Among the crowd were people from Bikom, which was destined to be his first field of labour, for he was appointed to work there together with two Mill Hill Fathers.”²⁹⁵

²⁹⁴ Paul Verdzekov L’effort Camerounais English Version

²⁹⁵ Paul Verdzekov L’effort Camerounais English Version September 3, 2009



Bishop Jules Peeters as a young priest in 1952

Setbacks in the Christian Village

In Kimbo, the Fathers would pay regular visits to the new Fon, Shem Ataar, enthroned in April 1947. They negotiated with him the site for a new church in Kimbo. This request was for land, a lot bigger than the one they now had, for a good church and school. They were to exchange the new plot with the one they now occupied. The Fon agreed. Present at the handing over ceremony were Father Leo Onderwater, Father Peter Heyman, Father Julius Peters, the great councillors of the Fon called vibay and the Hon. Vincent Lainjo. The Fon gave the mission the Hausa Quarters in exchange for the old church and school, which became his property. Father Julius Peters arrived in Shisong in 1951. In 1953, he built the new maternity and patients ward.



Father Leonard Jacobs

The same year, on September 24, 1953, the mission applied for a lease of some 500 acres to graze cattle. The mission had been using this land for over 10 years. The application was to regularise the position as some local farmers were attempting to reduce this acreage. I quote here the government's reaction to that application:

"I regret to inform you that your application for Right of occupancy for grazing land at Banso cannot be fully granted. The Honourable Minister of Lands and Surveys has informed the Resident that he is not convinced by the argument put forward in support of an application. He is of the opinion that the mission does not need anything like 500 acres for the purpose of supplying milk etc. to a comparatively small organization. In any case, it should not be impossible for the mission to buy the milk, butter and beef it needs in the open market. He is not impressed by the educational aspects of the scheme."²⁹⁶

²⁹⁶ From Shisong Archives

Within these years, Father Julius Peters became Parish priest of Shisong. He built the school in Kimbo and in 1955, the foundation stone of the Kimbo church, now cathedral church, was laid. His Lordship, Bishop Peter Rogan, laid the first stone, while the Fon laid the second one. Perhaps at this point it would serve a purpose to give a bird's-eye view of the setting in which these events occurred.

Occasionally some assisting priests were assigned full-time to teach and run the school as "School Fathers." The arrival of Rev. Father Thomas Burke Kennedy in Shisong in 1940 marked a turning point at the Sacred Heart School because he brought remarkable changes, including the building of new classrooms and the improvement of the environment; but particularly he purchased for the school a beautiful brass-band of British manufacture. Besides the revolution in music, marching and musical drill, the band-boys and the senior classes wore blue berets during festive occasions. Vincent Lainjo was in charge of all these and often led the band and the Shisong school to the Nso palace to pay respects to the Fon before marching into the field on Empire Days.

As already mentioned above, Reverend Father Ivo Stokman, a Dutch man, took over from Father Francis Figl, a Polish priest from Tyrol, who had held the Shisong Parish with iron hands for over five years. Soon after settlement, Father Stokman introduced a series of reforms in the parish. One of these was the expansion and reconstruction of mission houses, including the Shisong Convent, the Father's Main House and some old structures formerly housing the Catechists' school and technical workshops. This implied that some very faithful Christian squatters, who had settled on grounds allocated to the mission, would have to be displaced. Unfortunately for those who had claimed wide acreage of land as their farming plots and even planted economic crops such as Coffee Arabica, Orange trees, Avocado Pear, Kola nut and banana bushes, they would lose all these within a very short time, without compensation.

"The fact of having to be detached from the church house, which was their spiritual sanctuary and the task of acquiring new land outside and building new homes elsewhere and the hardness of heart of the priest of God, all of these taken together caused mixed feelings in the Christian community and the roots of faith for many were shaken. Recalling the suffering of these squatters in the hands of the "nwerong" and hostile pagans in the second decade, just barely 25 years previously, many were of opinion

that Father Stokman was inconsiderate and even wrong. Even Papa Paul Mbiybe Tangwa, the famous leader of the Christian colony at Shisong, was personally affected, since he had occupied a huge parcel of land where the medical doctors' residence now stands – extending to the Shwaiy stream. His open disagreement with the Parish Priest was scandalous and he had to abandon Shisong to resettle in his Mbivtinmbang residence. Many Christians took refuge to Taashwer on the western slopes of Shisong draining into Bui River and have settled there ever since. But some used this as an interim settlement while exploring other lands across the River Bui and outside the famous Shisong ridge, allocated in January 1913 to the Catholic Mission.²⁹⁷

This was the unfortunate end of a saga that had its lows and highs with a multiplicity of actors of different calibre, who nonetheless drummed the symphony of this noble enterprise towards its tragic end. The Christian village came to an end just when everyone thought it had come to stay.

²⁹⁷V.T Lainjo biography tribute by Dr. Daniel Lantum

The Christian Village of Njinikom

Introduction

Location

The village of Njinikom is one of many settlements in the Kom kingdom in the Bamenda Grassfields of the present-day North West Region in Cameroon. In the Bamenda Grass Fields, the Kom kingdom occupies an area of about 280 square miles at an average altitude of about 5000 feet above sea level. The palace of Kom is located on a peak higher than 6000 feet above sea level. A high, grassy plateau, the Bamenda Grass Fields region is characterized by a relatively high population density. Population estimates by the German explorers stood at 15 000 – 20 000 inhabitants. The terrain is rugged and diverse and most of the settlements are found in fertile valleys that intersect the highlands. The Grass Fields are inhabited by five main population groups. Besides the Hausa and the Fulani, the North West Region is inhabited by the Tikar, Widekum, Mbembe, Bali and Aghem. Oral tradition links the Kom to the Tikar, who migrated from the Upper Mbam River and its tributaries prior to the eighteenth century. Linguistic and archaeological research indicates a long, continuous occupation of the Bamenda highlands. Data pertaining to the early history of the Bamenda area suggest that the early Grass Field societies were not highly stratified.

Brief History

Nkwi reported that the ancestors of the Kom were formally settled with the Babessi with whom they had an entente. A Babessi Fon is reported to have tricked a Kom Fon to destroy his people. The Kom chief went and hanged himself in despair. The remnant people are said to have been led by a sister of the late Fon. The son of this sister became king. In Kom, it is said that the ancestors arrived at Laikom, the site of the Fon's palace, after following the track of a python. Most of those who tell the story say they are uncertain about where the Kom originally came from, perhaps from Tikari or Ndobo in the east. But all agree that the Kom were settled for a time in

Bamessi on the Ndop Plain and that they left there because of a trick played by the Bamessi Fon.²⁹⁸ However, others hold a contrary view. Ngam strongly

²⁹⁸The Kom people flourished and the wily Fon of Bamessi began to worry about the growing numbers of Kom. He suggested to the Kom Fon a plan to cope with food shortages by eliminating the younger section of the population.

The Kom Fon, whose name was Muni, agreed to the plan and the houses were built, but the Fon of Bamessi had his house built with two doors, while the guileless Muni built his according to instructions, with only one door. The Bamessi people escaped through the second door and the Kom people were destroyed when the houses were lit on fire. When Muni discovered the trick, he was so angry that he struck the Bamessi Fon on the head with the harp on which he had been playing laments for his lost people. Muni planned his revenge. After committing suicide, his body rotted, forming a lake and the maggots from the body became fish. It was this fish that attracted the people of Bamessing, luring them to the death and sparking off a wave of migration. While Nkwi mentions Babessi other Researchers name Bamessi as the location. For example, Prof. (Nawayn) Eugenia Shanklin in an article titled “*Exploding lakes and maleficent water in Grassfields legends and myth*”, writes “[...] I was curious about this story, so I went to Bamessi, where the Kom migration was said to have begun and I saw a number of things there that appeared to ‘confirm’ the story. Much of the Kom story, of course, is concerned with the human motives for and the outcomes of, the migration but there is some strange physical evidence at Bamessi, some unexplained elements that the Kom migration story brings together very well. There is no lake at Bamessi but there is a large swampy area where no one goes, not even to tap the raffia palm trees that grow in profusion. There is no python trail but there are strange cracks in the earth’s surface that resemble tracks, except that they take directions that no human or domesticated animal would take.” Rev. Sr. Alexine Munteh, an indigene of Kom who worked in Bamessi wrote in AFOaKOM@yahoo.com, on Friday, January 27, 2012, Briefly, I worked in Ndop for a little more than 5 years ending in 1983. Within the period many of my duties had something to do with Bamessi to where I had to go several times. During one of these occasions, the companion I had with me was of Bamessi origin. While in the Palace, the question of the historical relations between Kom and Bamessi arose in the course of our discussions. I asked among other things if the fish pond or exact place where the Bamessi people drowned was available, physically existing and could be shown to me. My companions told me yes and right at that time. I was escorted to a thicket, dark grove. My escorts stopped about 15 metres away and pointed, they told me that, as Bamessi people, they could not go further. They cannot enter there. If they enter, they will be swallowed by the earth beneath their feet. If I thought that I could go further, responsibility for the

asserts that the epic of the python is a myth. Not all Kom people entered Kom at the same time, neither are they all linked to the Tikaris but came from a myriad of tribes as far as Nigeria.²⁹⁹

The typical political organization of the Grass Fields was the chiefdom, federating descent groups under the leadership of a council or clan and lineage elders presided over by the Fon, a “*primus inter pares*”. As a result of economic and political changes in the pre-colonial era, a number of strong, highly stratified and centralized kingdoms, including Kom, emerged along the most important trade routes. After the decrease of the Atlantic slave trade, the Grass Fields supplied slave labour for the prospering palm oil plantations in Calabar. Kom kingdom was a major provider of slaves, obtained through raids and warfare. Increased trading activity in the 19th century laid the basis for the territorial expansion of Kom and the consolidation of its hegemony over smaller Grass Fields chiefdoms. Kola, slaves, iron goods, guns and livestock were the main goods traded by 19th century Kom traders. The expansion of trade resulted in an increase in social stratification, with a new social group emerging: merchants with large compounds and large numbers of wives.³⁰⁰

In general, the Grass Field economies characterized by a sharp gender division of labour according to a common sub-Saharan pattern: women perform subsistence farming and prepare food; men perform income-generating activities, trade, clear the bush and assist in the harvest. The organization of the Kom economy followed these general lines. Agricultural production in Kom is largely the responsibility of women, who produce

consequences remained mine. I braved up and advanced 3 more steps, looked and looked attentively into the area, my eye view interpreted what land surface I was looking at was wet, dead silent surroundings, cropped at the top with the kind of green plants that belong to such places. “This is where my foyn died”. I turned to my companions and we returned to the palace. Perhaps to further examine some of the practical things that go on now, we find that Kom has no traditional diplomatic relations with Bamessi as against all others or most tribes of the Ndop plain. I have not noticed any inter marriages between the two tribes.

²⁹⁹ Bochong Ngam Chia Francis (2001), *The Customs and Traditions of the Kom Man*, the Last Words of an Elderly Man.

³⁰⁰ Vries Jacqueline, (1998) *Catholic Mission, Colonial Government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon)* African Studies Research Centre. P.10

enough food to satisfy local needs. Men assist in the clearing of farms and in the harvesting of crops — mainly maize, guinea-corn, cocoyam, yams, sweet potatoes and cassava. Kola used to be an important cash crop but was largely replaced by coffee in the second half of the last century. Cattle are reared largely by the Fulani and constitute a considerable source of income for the local economy, as pastoralists pay a special tax called *jangali*. Herding also gives rise to considerable friction between graziers and farmers because of damage brought to crops by stray cattle.

The Kwifon, the executive arm of the Fon's government, is endowed with advisory, judicial and ritual functions. Orders and message from the Fon were communicated to the Kom people through Kwifon retainers. The Kwifon is a highly secretive body, organized in a hierarchy of lodges. Membership in its inner lodges is sharply restricted. In the execution of state duties, Kwifon officials appeared clothed in net gowns, which masked the face and body. Its authority is of an impersonal kind and its agents could not be held to account by the populace.³⁰¹ The Kwifon not only executed orders of the Fon, but also regulated economic affairs, such as inaugurating the harvest by performing fertility rituals at a certain time and controlling the market. Duties of the Kwifon also included the recruitment of palace retainers from among freeborn commoners.

The Fon stood very much apart from the rest of the populace, living in a palace on the hilltop of Laikom. He was regarded with infinite respect and surrounded with carefully guarded secrecy. His household consisted of numerous wives, pages, guards and advisors. Around the turn of the century, the Fon of Kom had hundreds of wives and he had more than a hundred when the Germans took control of Cameroon. The numerous wives and children at the palace served to enhance the Fon's prestige and demonstrate his wealth, in addition to consolidating alliances with other kingdoms by intermarriage. Royal wives functioned primarily as the Fon's farmers and cooks and were recruited from among the freeborn population at large. The Fon's extensive rights to claim women in marriage or to dispose of them to others was one of his most important prerogatives, which became a source of considerable political struggle in the colonial era.

³⁰¹ Chilver Elisabeth, M & Phyllis M. Kaberry (1967), *Traditional Bamenda. The Pre-colonial History and Ethnography of Bamenda Grassfields*, S. L. (Buea)

A variety of pages, retainers and messengers played important roles at the palace. There were various positions within these ranks, but, for the sake of simplicity, the whole of the Fon's male servants and assistants will be referred to here as *chindas*. Most *chindas* entered the Fon's service between the ages of 7 and 14 years. Service to the Fon generally lasted between six and eighteen years. At the palace, *chindas* were trained to carry out a variety of duties, ranging from manual labour to advising the Fon (in the role of Kwifon retainers), the more gifted ones being granted more responsible tasks and privileges. *Chindas* were trained in strict discipline, obedience, docility and loyalty and sworn to secrecy. Service to the Fon was compulsory and unpopular. Many resented being called to the Fon's aid and attempts to escape were frequent, though considerable prestige was usually conferred on the *chindas* after retirement. When the time came for a retainer to leave the palace, his father, assisted by kin, brought a considerable investment in goats, food and wine to the palace. Because of the heavy financial burden this implied, a family generally could not have more than one son in the service of the Fon.³⁰²

Another important role in the Fon's household was reserved for the "queen-mother," Nafon, usually the most senior woman of the Fon's matrilineage. The Nafon was without a doubt the most influential woman in the kingdom. Though she did not have institutionalized political or judicial powers, she was in a position to advise the Fon personally on a wide range of matters. She was usually not married, but was free to take lovers. She could sit in the Fon's court and usually her opinion was sought. She was highly respected throughout the kingdom. It is significant that, despite the highly structured hierarchy of the palace and the centralization of authority, political power in Kom was not strictly hereditary: wealth, wisdom, loyalty and birth could win an individual prestige and political influence, particularly at the village level. Age remained an important determining factor, too. Elders were held to be the incarnation of wisdom and justice and youths were excluded from important judicial and political positions.

³⁰²De Vries Jacqueline, (1998) Catholic Mission, Colonial Government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon) African Studies

The Subjugation of Kom Kingdom

Pavel returned to Bafut in order to subdue the surrounding villages. This took place on December 24, 1901. Soon after defeating Bobeka village, Pavel found a large herd of cattle belonging to the chief of Bafut. He killed 10 and the rest fled. Moving in the direction of Kom, Pavel came across two villages, Mejung (Banetjong) and Menjang (Benetjang), erroneously believed to be Bafut vassals. These were tributary chieflets of Kom. Pavel notes that these two villages had not joined Bafut in attacking the Zintgraff's expedition four years earlier. On reaching Mambui (Bambui), Pavel was congratulated by the chiefs for his defeat of Bafut. On December 29, 1901, the expedition wanted to move on to Kom but received a legation from Kom that brought not only food and provisions but also promises of peace. Such peace terms were to be discussed further at the station and Pavel returned to Bali to rest.³⁰³

In 1884, Cameroon became a German protectorate, but since the Germans were primarily interested in the exploitation of the coastal areas, where climatic and soil conditions were favourable to plantation agriculture, the Grass Fields escaped direct European penetration until the late 19th century. In 1889, Zintgraff, a German explorer, canvassed the area for economic resources potentially useful to Germany. In 1890, he visited Kom, where he met with outright hostility, but Kom had no further contact with Germans until 1901, when patrols, engaged in a punitive expedition against Kom's neighbour and rival, Bafut, crossed the Kom border.³⁰⁴ On February 11, 1902, Pavel filed a report from Banyo giving a description of his journey from Bali to Banyo. Leaving Bali on January 8 with 5 officers, 150 black soldiers and 600 carriers, the expedition received a warm reception at Bambui where the Fon of Kom, the chiefs of Bambili, Bambui and Mejang had gathered to welcome him. Again, the chiefs rejoiced over the Bafut defeat and pledged to supply both labour and provisions to the new station. Bafut appears to have been a nuisance in the region through its frequent predatory raids.³⁰⁵

³⁰³De Vries Jacqueline, (1998) Catholic Mission, Colonial Government and Indigenous Response in Kom (Cameroon) African Studies Research Centre.

³⁰⁴ Chilver & Kaberry 1967: op. cit p.123

³⁰⁵NKWI, Paul Nchoji (1989), German presence in the western Grassfields 1891-1913 A German Colonial Account, Leiden p.40

The apparent allegiance of Kom to the colonial rulers was, however, short-lived. In 1904, Fon Yuh rejected the German demands for labour, provoking a German military invasion of Kom. The German offensive was determined and bitter: all villages on their path were burned down completely, the palace at Laikom was occupied and later burnt and crops were destroyed.³⁰⁶ Fon Yuh went into hiding but, after seven months of battle, was persuaded to sign a peace pact with the German aggressor in 1905, thereby placing Kom under German administration. A shortage of old men in Kom in the 1920s is testimony to the severity of the confrontation between the Germans and the Kom people: the men fled during the German offensive and died of cold and hunger.

After the subjugation of Kom, the relationship between Fon Yuh and the German authorities seems to have been cordial. The head-tax, which was introduced in 1909, was paid regularly and Kom supplied the porters and station labour demanded of it. On August 4, 1908, Clauming visited the Fon of Kom, Fon Yuh and “was kindly received by the old chief. The expedition arrived back in Bamenda on August 8, after about six weeks’ absence. Young men were recruited into the German Schutztruppe as soldiers, messengers and carriers, providing the Germans with the information necessary for administration. In 1908, the Germans established a military post at Njinikom.”³⁰⁷

Direct German interference with Fon Yuh’s authority seems to have been minimal, but unintended effects of the German colonial presence can be noted. After the penetration of the Kom area by German troops and the official establishment of German rule in 1905, some sub-chiefdoms, which had been subjected to Kom hegemony in the 19th century, began to strive for secession from Kom, seeing the Germans rather than the Fon of Kom as their new superiors. Through German recognition of the Fon of Kom’s authority, Kom control was re-established: Fon Yuh became the official tax collector for the German government for Kom proper and for the sub-chiefdoms concerned. Fon Yuh died in 1912. During his reign, Kom had prospered economically, power had been centralized, consolidated and

³⁰⁶ Nkwi Paul Nchoji (1976) *Traditional Government and social Change. A study of the Political Institution among the Kom of the Cameroon Grassfields*. 140

³⁰⁷ Nkwi) 1976) p. 140

enhanced by colonial support and the territorial boundaries of the kingdom had been expanded. Laikom had increased in population and in ritual importance, numbering more than 250 houses and over 1000 inhabitants in 1912.

Because of increasing population pressure at Laikom and controversies among some royal lineages, several new settlements had been founded a short distance away from the capital, including Njinikom and Fanantui. After Fon Yuh's death in 1912, Fon Ngam succeeded him; it was at the close of German rule in Cameroon. Ngam's dealings with the German administration reveal some of the incipient conflicts troubling the Kom kingdom around the turn of the century. Prior to his succession to the throne, Ngam, then heir apparent, had presumably made himself unpopular. His inauguration was a troubled one, as he was embroiled in a conflict with three other princes of the blood and several of Yuh's sons.³⁰⁸ Though there are conflicting accounts as to the nature of the quarrel, it appears these royals refused to recognize Ngam as Fon, perhaps because he had abolished the practice permitting senior princes of the blood to marry the widows of the deceased Fon. Fearing opposition to his rule, Ngam accused these princes of treason. The German authorities had the new Fon's opponents executed, upon which some of Yuh's widows committed suicide. Fon Ngam was cursed, such that future chiefs were allegedly robbed of their power of protective clairvoyance. The Nafon at that time, Naya'a, went into voluntary exile, taking a contingent of followers with her to demonstrate her disapproval of Ngam's methods. After she returned to Kom many years later, she refused to live at Laikom. Ngam's royal rivals, including the Nafon, became Christians and moved away from the palace. Naya'a was the first highly placed royal to convert to Christianity.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸Chilver & Kaberry (1967), op. Cit. 45

³⁰⁹The queen mother Naya'a had fled Kom because some of her brothers had been killed in a family dispute. Before her death as a Christian, she had given precise instructions on how and where she should be buried. After her death, the Fon protested to the civil authorities of the time. The Fon went on to remind Father Moran that he would accept the Church only if they allowed him to remove and re-bury the corpse of his mother. Father Moran worked out a compromise with the Divisional officer by which the Christians would bring the corpse in a procession and give it a Christian burial at the royal site. The peace-

Though the intricacies and implications of this episode are not clear, it is evident that Fon Ngam's position as omnipotent ruler was disputed, at least by some royals, from the early days of his reign. It is also clear that marriage politics were a volatile source of conflict and that Fon Ngam was not averse to collaborating with the German rulers to enhance his own power. The dissension among the royals is not stressed in studies of Kom, but it is noteworthy that as early as 1912 internal political affairs in Kom had become inextricably intertwined with colonial relations of power. The conflicts that would plague Kom in the 1920s were rooted in that earlier period.

German Pallotine Missionary in Fujua Mission Station

The Christian missionary activity in Cameroon was concentrated along the coast until the turn of the century. In 1903, the Basel Mission opened a mission station in the Bamenda Grass Fields at Bali and in 1912; the Catholic Fathers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus founded a mission station in Shisong. It was from Shisong that the same missionary order founded the first mission station in Fujua, a short distance away from Laikom. At that point, a Catholic priest and two brothers were granted land at Fujua to build a station and establish a school, with a three-year educational programme entirely in German. In 1913, the school boasted an enrolment of 120 boys, including seven sons of Fon Ngam.³¹⁰

The German mission station was far from completed when the missionaries were forced to leave the area late in 1915. According to British reports, the mission compound measured about 100 by 100 yards, with "12 outhouses, all of them badly damaged and in various stages of disrepair," and pigsties and stalls for oxen. The mission house itself was a large brick building with a grass roof and a mud floor. Adjoining the mission was a "bush church" measuring about 40 by 20 feet. It is difficult to determine how these early missionaries were received in Kom. Most informants maintain that originally Fon Ngam had been apprehensive but not hostile towards the missionaries, giving them one of his own pipes to indicate his goodwill. According to Nkwi, "Fon Ngam warmly received them and gave them a rich,

making efforts of Father Moran were approved by the administration and paved the way for the re-opening of Njinikom in 1927.

³¹⁰Nkwi (1976) op. Cit. 167

fertile area at Fujua.”³¹¹ He further maintained, “The Fon was very keen on their work, especially the school.”³¹² The Fon, indeed, granted the land on which the mission station was built freehold and supported the missionary effort by providing the mission with building materials and clothing for the school pupils. What is certain, however, is that in the new dispensation, traditional rulers no longer had the final say when it came to granting of land rights for missionary or colonial administrative purposes.

According to Michael Timneng in his autobiography, the German mission at Fujua was established in 1911. Nkwi dates the establishment of the mission to 1913. The apparently harmonious relationship between the Fon and the missionaries is further indicated by the fact that, when the German missionaries were banned from Kom, they brought all their valuables and books to the Fon for safekeeping during their absence, clearly intending to continue after the war.³¹³ Yet Nkwi’s claim that “the Fon was certainly preoccupied with the furthering of the missionary efforts”³¹⁴ may overestimate the Fon’s goodwill. All whites were regarded with a certain degree of suspicion because of the Fon’s previous encounters with German soldiers. It seems plausible that the mission was allocated land very close to the Fon’s palace so that the Fon could keep a close eye on the activities of the missionaries. Oral testimonies suggest that Ngam’s interest in the mission stemmed primarily from the advantage he imagined Kom people would gain by taking part in “Whiteman’s” education. Whether the Fon’s allegiance to the German Catholics was, as Nkwi maintains, motivated by a genuine acceptance of the new religion, by curiosity, or by a feeling that he and his Fondom might gain more by co-operating with the priests than by resisting them overtly remains open to debate. The ostensibly friendly reception granted the missionaries by the Fon did not imply that the people of Kom were prepared to demonstrate the same tolerance towards the new religion. Some Cameroonians were pleasantly surprised that the German missionaries “were not like the German soldiers whom they had met so often.”³¹⁵

³¹¹ Ibid p.158

³¹² Ibid p.158

³¹⁴ Ibid p. 164

³¹⁵First Cameroonian catechist, Peter Wake, cited in Ndi (1986) p. 22.

The significance of the early German missions lies primarily in the foundations they laid for further Christianisation in Kom. The outbreak of World War I did not mean the end of the German missionary influence in Kom, for the German army in the Bamenda area included a number of Catholic leaders whose influence was far greater than that exerted by the pioneer missionaries who had settled at Fujua. More than 500 men from Kom, mostly catechumens, were recruited into the German colonial army to take part in the German defence against the invasion of the protectorate by British and French troops. Service in the German colonial army was a punishment imposed on them by the Fon for their acceptance of the “Whiteman’s religion”.

The details relating to the recruitment remain vague, as oral and written sources contradict each other on this point, but there is no doubt that the First World War was a crucial episode in the history of Kom because of the participation of Christian soldiers in the German war effort. After the defeat of the Germans, most Kom recruits fled with the German troops to Fernando Po. There, they worked as servants for the Germans with whom they were interned and many Kom soldiers were further educated in Christianity, reading, writing and German. Compared to their compatriots back in Kom, these men experienced an intensive confrontation with “Western” Christian culture. Many of the recruits were baptized during their internment, so that they would be qualified to lead the Christian communities in their villages upon their return. The return of the Christian recruits to Kom signalled the beginning of the second phase of mission activity in Kom, one under indigenous leadership.

Following the partition of Cameroon and the possession of the sphere by the British, the question of enemy property and, more importantly in our case, mission property became an issue of importance. The Secretary of State requested a report showing what has been done with regard to the property of the Church in the British Sphere of the Mission of the Sacred Heart at Kumbo and elsewhere. He requested an exact and detailed inventory of all articles of property belonging to the mission, now under the care of the British, a detailed report of the state of the buildings when Britain assumed charge of the Division and information on any damage or looting of the

mission properties, a rough estimate of the damage and whether German or British troops or Natives were responsible.³¹⁶

Information in duplicate lists of property belonging to the mission stored in the Fort at Bamenda, together with covering Minutes from the Officer Commander of Troops, were carefully compiled at that time. Reports showed loads of medicines, bandages and hospital equipment that were taken over by the Cross River Column. One cow belonging to the mission, brought in from the town of Bum, was sold for 60 marks. The amount was paid in revenue. This mission property was inspected and certified by Shanahan the Apostolic Administrator. From his enquiries, it appeared that no property was left at the mission except a small quantity of furniture and school equipment, which the Fon of Kom was mandated to look after. However, Shanahan managed to recover a few items such as the church plate and vestments.³¹⁷ In a detailed report drawn up at Shanahan's request, an inventory and description of the mission property in Fujua was outlined.³¹⁸

The Reins of the Departing Sacred Heart Missionaries

The Roman Catholic mission at Bekom was situated about one hour walk from the Chief's compound, due west, on the north side of the hill at its foot and lying a short distance from the main road to Kentu. A compound about 200 yards long and 100 yards broad contained 12 out-houses, all of them bush buildings. When the British troops arrived at the compound, the buildings were already in various stages of disrepair. The mission house itself was a large brick building with a grass roof. The floor was of mud – no

³¹⁶Correspondence from the Divisional Officer Bamenda to the Resident Bamenda Division, 10th April 1919 In the same correspondence he added that "From enquiries I have made, there appears to be no property remaining at this Mission excepting a small quantity of furniture and school equipment which the chief of Bekom is looking after. I will send an officer for this and at the same time, he can measure up the building - When this is done I will submit a further report upon this Mission"

³¹⁷ Correspondence from J.S. Shanahan, C.S.Sp. Ecclesiastical Apostolic Administrator of Adamawa Mission to the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division

³¹⁸ Shanahan noted below the list of church vestments and other items that "It should be noted that Government in no way holds itself responsible for handing over the church property as it was found.

cement had been used to face the walls. Some buildings were in a very bad state of repair, having been damaged by fire shortly before it was evacuated. The doors and window frames were made of roughly hewn wood. The other buildings were of no value.³¹⁹

No property of any value was left behind. All valuables were brought to the Chief of Kom by the Fathers when they left for Kumbo at the start of the war. These were sent to Bamenda and stored there. Tools from the mission were also stored at Bamenda. A few things such as the harmonium were left with the Fon of Kom to be cared for by him. The ground on which the mission was built was presented freehold to the Society by the Chief of Bekom. The whole compound, according to Podevin's report, was overgrown; there were, however, signs of cultivation now nearly obliterated. Further, there was evidence that a certain amount of livestock had been kept there, as there were ruined pig sties and stalls for oxen.³²⁰

The Gathering of the Storm and Foundation of the Christian Village

The German mission site was completely abandoned and a new site with boarding accommodation was built at Njinikom with the permission of the Fon or provincial administration. 200 converts, mostly ex-German soldiers, settled there. This community in Njinikom was referred to as a Bolshevik society. Free from all authority, the society was accused of engaging in all activities contrary to traditional norms. According to N.C. Duncan, the Fon's police were flogged, which was considered the equivalent to striking the Fon himself. Further, he witnessed a case where mission boys waylaid and deprived a man of eighteen pounds. Unfortunately, none of the assailants were identified. To show how far this society had estranged itself from all constituted authority, the Fon had diverted the main road, which previously ran through the enclave of the Christian settlement, to avoid insults.

³¹⁹ Correspondence from the Assistant District Officer Bamenda Division to the District Officer Bamenda, 23rd of March 1917

³²⁰ BNA-Sd 1916/1, Correspondence from the District Officer in charge of Bamenda Division G.S. Podevin to the Resident British Cameroon Buea, 24th January 1917. In a complementary correspondence, the District Officer in charge of Bamenda Division added, "the bell is being used at the prison until such time as I receive instructions as to the disposal of the property.

In 1921, in a letter from Divisional Officer, N.C. Duncan to Monsignor Plissonneau, several charges were brought against the mission. First, the removal of the Catholic mission from its old site and its reopening at the village of Njinikom was done without due permission. One of the missionaries, Father Bintner, on his return from Luxembourg, had moved the mission to the village of Njinikom against the Fon's advice and consent and without the sanction of the British government. According to Duncan, this resulted in native disturbances of a very serious nature. In the opinion of the Divisional Officer, the disturbances had the potential to cause an open civil war between the animist natives and Christian natives, which he referred to as a political community.

Members of this community, aided by ex-German soldiers, were continually seducing the wives of the Fon and other chiefs and retaining them in the so-called mission compound. Besides married women of commoners and royals alike, unmarried girls were also harboured in this enclave. To show how depraved the Bolshevik society had become, the Divisional Officer said it was not the fault of the European missionaries. "When a Father arrives to inspect, the women are hidden. At present, eight of the Fon's domestics are living with the mission teachers. This is an offence punishable by death under Native Law."³²¹ The community had refused to acknowledge the Fon's jurisdiction and to further compound issues, addressed him by his name instead of by his title. It equally made use of every available means to protect the chapel. It seems that this community had no limit to its powers. It had attempted to prevent the blessings of the crops and, if not for the presence of Mr. Hunt, matters would have boiled over. Native police had no powers and were not permitted to pass through the village of Njinikom on the main road.

According to Mr. Williams, the Fon, despite these insults, was moderate in his tone and was not in any way opposed to the missionary enterprise as a whole. He favoured, however, a European supervised mission. In the end, the Fon absolved himself from any responsibility if the native teachers were allowed to continue in their conduct contrary to native law and custom. Duncan was of the opinion that, if the tensions between the new "Bolshevik society" and the Fon were to subside, the mission had to be moved from its present site to its former site. Secondly, religious instructions to females had

³²¹ BNA-Sd 1921/1, memorandum from Divisional Officer to Resident, 31.1.1922.

to be discontinued until European sisters were available to supervise their education in a separate school.³²²

In 1922, no European missionary resided in Kom. The conduct of the mission was entirely in the hands of natives, who were giving religious instructions to married women and young girls of marriageable age living in the mission compound, which was against all norms. The retention of married women and young girls in the mission compound infuriated their husbands and fathers and aroused suspicion in the entire community. In Njinikom, the Christian teachers were bringing together all Christians principally women from the whole of Kom and were accused of forming a political organisation disregarding all native laws and customs.

In 1923, the English Mill Hill Missionaries replaced the French Sacred Heart Missionaries, but a lot remained unchanged. The situation had deteriorated even further and the relations between the Church and the Fons were very tense. There was no communication between the chief and the hamlet of Njinikom. Kube, the elder of Njinikom, had died and no successor had been appointed so that, as far as the chief of Bekom was concerned, Njinikom had not been administered during that period.

The Fons in the Bamenda Grass Fields were sceptical about the activities of the representatives of the new religion. The Christians' potential to undermine the previously undoubted omnipotence of the Fons was keenly felt. Their cautious acquaintance with Whiteman's education had acquired a momentum of its own, beyond the direct control of the Fons and many traditional rulers welcomed the opportunity provided by the change in European leadership to attempt to diminish the Christian influence.

Fon Ngam, who had been apprehensive about but certainly not hostile towards the missionaries at Fujua before the outbreak of the First World War, emerged as a fervent anti-Christian during this period when the self-confident and determined Kom catechist Michael Timneng led the mission effort. The conflict between the two men served to exacerbate tensions between the Christian and the non-Christian people of Kom, making colonial intervention virtually inevitable. A major source of conflict was the control over women: the Fon's resentment increased sharply when his wives were offered refuge at the mission compound.

³²² BNA-Sd 1921/1, memorandum from Divisional Officer, N.C. Duncan to Resident, 31.1.1921

Strife and Dissension: Converts versus Traditional Authorities

The scenario in Njinikom had no parallel elsewhere in the southern Cameroons. Nso had political institutions similar to Kom's. Christianity posed the same dangers, but the crisis in Njinikom was intense and prolonged. The remote cause of the crisis that rocked Njinikom lies elsewhere, not in the friction between Christians and indigenes. Oral resources referred to Njinikom as being an age-old refuge for witches, wizards and other people chased out of their home communities during the annual witchcraft ordeals. According to oral tradition, Njinikom had been uninhabited when the Kom kingdom was founded. When the migratory wave of Kom had taken possession of its present day location, People settled in all the other ridges, but nobody wanted to settle in Njinikom. After many years of settlement, witch-hunting began. Everybody suspected of witchcraft was sent to Njinikom, which was then a penal settlement "It was expected that our fathers would come here and die. But the Kom man, even from old, never wanted to kill an innocent freeborn on the basis of suspicion (...) I do not know whether or not everybody sent here was a witch or a wizard, but I am sure that the population of Njinikom has always included many who had supernatural powers".³²³

According to a former palace guard,

"Njinikom was the land of witches long before Christianity came. Njinikom was just an empty land at first. Then those in the occupied area entered into a pact to abandon destructive witchcraft. Anybody suspected of witchcraft was chased away from the settlement zone and the only place that they could go to was Njinikom. It was thus common knowledge that everybody who came to Njinikom was a witch. The people in the settlement zone resented them. It was also common knowledge that Njinikom could only bring trouble to the Kom kingdom. So the rivalry already existed before Christianity came (...) some people were exiled to Njinikom innocently. They could not go back to their own ridges nor

³²³Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief), Njinikom 15.8.1994. Also Yongabi Polycarp (Catholic school teacher), Njinikom 17.8.1994; and Valentine Nke (nephew of Timneng), Bamenda 22.8.1994 in De Vries p. 43

could they go elsewhere. They had to stay in Njinikom alongside the real witches and wizards. When Timneng brought Christianity and promised people that it could protect them from witches, they had no alternative. People at Njinikom who did not agree to be converted were automatically identified as witches. To try to prevent themselves from being branded, they eventually agreed to be converted”³²⁴.

Some claim that the Fon deliberately had the church established at Njinikom because he hoped that the Whiteman would do away with the witches or vice versa. They claim that the Fon knew that the people of Njinikom did not respect him and had been undermining his authority. He and his councillors, not wanting to arouse the wrath of the Whiteman, decided to send the church to Njinikom.”³²⁵ Such opinions are unfounded and erroneous. The church had been founded at Fajua and, after the First World War; Timneng orchestrated its transfer to Njinikom against the wishes of the Fon. The idea that the Fon had sent the church to Njinikom with the hope that the Whiteman would do away with the witches and wizards or vice versa is a mythical construction that gained currency over time without any historical basis.

Such erroneous schools of thought add that the Fon did not expect that the two groups of outsiders — the Whiteman and the Njinikom people — would become allies rather than opponents. As if to buttress their point, they contend that those accused of witchcraft came to Njinikom to seek asylum in the church. They ran to Njinikom because they knew the priests would protect them. The witches came after the church had come, after the Whiteman came and wanted to guard the lives even of witches. However, it

³²⁴ Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994. in De Vries OP. Cit. p.43

³²⁵ Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief), Njinikom 15.8.1994. The idea that it was in the

interest of society at large to allot the Christian church a site in a neighbourhood considered to be

Inhabited by evil spirits, was not limited to Njinikom. In the novel *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua

Achebe describes the land allotted to the Christian mission as the “evil forest”: Achebe 1958. De Vries Op. Cit. p. 44

is also plausible that Njinikom had indeed had a tradition of relative open-mindedness and had been a meeting place for people with alternative ideas or deviant behaviour, making it possible for Christianity to gain a foothold there more easily than in other places.³²⁶ The witchcraft story strongly suggests that the rivalry between Christians and non-Christians, geographically defined as the rivalry between Njinikom village and the other Kom settlements, was older than the Christian mission in Kom.

The kingdom of Kom became a player in the global political dynamics without necessarily wishing to. European squabbles were felt in almost every part of the world, some of which neither understood nor had a stake in the war. When Cameroon began to feel the effects of the global war, very few Cameroonians were in a position to appreciate the meaning of their involvement in what was essentially a European war. It was virtually impossible for Cameroonians to judge what English or French rule might mean to them in comparison with German rule: in the minds of many, all Whiteman came from the same country. The Kom people could not possibly have grasped the causes and consequences of a war so foreign to them. Early in the war, the Fon had been given to believe that the British intended to enslave the entire Kom kingdom, including the Fon himself. Fon Ngam's prestige and power had been enhanced by German colonial support, but it remained to be seen what role the British would allot him.

The Return of the Recruits

During the First World War, the German army relied heavily on Cameroonian soldiers. In total, some 10,000 Cameroonians were enlisted in the German Schutztruppe. As noted previously, many young men from Kom served as soldiers in the German army. Some were recruited directly into the army by the Fon, but some joined the army voluntarily after having served their six months of compulsory plantation labour for the German government. Their actual military performance was short-lived, as the German forces were driven to Spanish Guinea and Fernando Po early in the war in 1915.³²⁷

³²⁶Interview Prince Mbain Henry, Buea 31.8.1994. De Vries op. Cit. P. 44

³²⁷ De Vries op. cit. p. 37

Nonetheless, their service in the German army left strong impressions on the recruits. Living and working in continuous, direct contact with Germans gave these men an intensive introduction to Western culture. As in the case of migrants, who had been away from Kom to work on plantations on the coast, the adventures of these men conferred on them a great deal of status and prestige. In contrast to the plantation workers, however, the soldiers had lived in a community dominated by the presence of Europeans for a continuous stretch of about five years. Their involvement in that peculiar wartime society of interned Germans, mostly soldiers, presumably all Christians, had great repercussions on the development of Christianity in Kom as these returning soldiers re-established the Catholic Church in Njinikom. In 1919, most of the recruited soldiers from Kom were repatriated from Fernando Po. They numbered 400 ex-soldiers, about 170 women, 50 children and 95 servants.³²⁸

The return of the Christian recruits to Kom was a cause for concern for the newly established colonial government because of the religious enthusiasm of the ex-soldiers and their apparent loyalty to Germany. Local officials noted the tense anticipation and excitement that accompanied the soldiers' return to Kom and advised the Resident in Buea to keep a close eye on the activities of the converts. Their potential threat to the authority of the traditional rulers was not a welcome prospect to the British. Among the Christian recruits returning to Kom in 1919 was Michael Timneng, a former palace guard turned Christian and the leader of the early Christian movement in Kom. While at Fernando Po, Timneng had served as a houseboy to a German army-priest, who instructed Timneng to bring Christianity back to his people upon his return to Kom and gave him a German catechism to aid him in this task.

According to oral sources, the conflict between Timneng and the Fon had its roots in the pre-wars years.

Timneng was seen as a dangerous element who used Christianity to cloak his evil intentions. Among the palace guards, he was known as a stubborn boy.

"I knew Timneng before he left the palace. He was a very stubborn boy and everybody but Johannes Ngom abandoned him. That meant nothing to him. Every soothsayer at the palace had predicted that Timneng would bring

³²⁸BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1919, p.9.

disorder to the country. I was with him the day that he escaped from the palace, taking with him Johannes and other stubborn Njinikom boys. He had stoned a chinda and broken his skull. Blood was still flowing from the man's head and he (Timneng) just went away, never even stopping to apologize. He was never seen again at the palace. When he came back with religion it was no surprise to me. I knew everything about Timneng was bad".³²⁹

When the Germans asked the Fon to send capable men to assist in sending away the British, the Fon's wandering thoughts certainly settled on undesirable delinquent elements in the tribe. It was hoped that the recruitment of such wayward indigenes would rid the tribe once and for all of those errant, obstinate misfits. Immediately, the Fon sent out a recruiting squad with orders that Timneng and Ngom must be among those enlisted for German service.

"The Fon was still considering what to do with Timneng (after he stoned the chinda), when the Germans sent a message, telling the Fon of the approach of the British and their evil intentions. The Fon was informed that the British were coming all the way from their country to destroy all kingdoms and Fondoms and make slaves out of everybody, the Fon inclusive. The Germans asked the Fon to send capable men to assist in sending away the British. Immediately the Fon sent out a recruiting squad with orders that Timneng and Ngom must be among those enlisted for German service. Timneng escaped for two weeks and nobody knew where he was. When Ngom was captured, Timneng came out of hiding and went to his mother's hut. Before dawn a group of palace guards came to his mother's hut and compelled Timneng to submit. He was taken away with other recruits for a short training in Bamenda, before they started the march for Fernando Po. Before he left, Timneng said that would be the last time the palace would ever command him. He told his mother not to fear, for he would rather be killed by the Whiteman than by the Fon."³³⁰

By all standards and from all indications, Timneng was the least suitable and most unlikely candidate to be chosen by providence to lead the new religion following the departure of the Sacred Heart missionaries. The

³²⁹ Interview Yindo James Nsah (retired chinda), Njinikom 17.8.1994. in De Vries, op. Cit. p.40

³³⁰ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994 in De Vries, op. Cit. p.50

conflict between Timneng and the Fon was almost a personal vendetta. It is for this reason that the conflict between the Christians and the rest of the kin and kith assumed a more alarming proportion in Kom than anywhere else in the Grass Fields. Timneng's conversion was a betrayal by one who knew too much about the inner cycles of secretive lodges of the palace. According to a former chinda:

“It was like some treachery. We felt we had been betrayed. When I say we, I mean palace notables and traditional authorities. This was Timneng, who had been amongst the palace guards at the palace. This same Timneng had been recruited into the army by the Fon for the Germans. Timneng goes to Fernando Po and on his return he brings with him a contrasting religion whose sole aim is to destroy the old order. Do you think we in the secret house could have been comfortable? No, certainly not. There is one thing that you book-people have never wanted to accept. Timneng was not an ordinary man. It was one of the reasons that they had enlisted him in the German army. Soothsayers in the palace had always said that Timneng had a very bad scheme in the pipeline for the Kom kingdom. Timneng is not a stranger to me. He was strong, yes, really strong. Even before he entered the German army, he was considered a wizard. People always advised us to leave him alone, so when he came back and took a stand against us we were not taken unawares. We had always thought that he could not bring anything but bad luck to the kingdom.”³³¹

The Emergence of Michael Timneng

When the Kom recruits from the German army were released from their internment in 1919, Timneng led the delegation back home. His participation in the pre-war Christian community of Fujua is not very clear. However, according to him, when they were about to leave Fernando Po for Kom in October 1919, the Reverend Fathers gave him, Michael Tum, a Catholic

³³¹Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994 in De Vries, op. Cit p.51

catechism in the German language. The Father asked the Christians to come home and be beside him for doctrine. Some of them obediently did so, but some refused to learn. According to Timneng

“It was a marvellous thing to the natives. When they saw us every Sunday gathered in Chiamba’s premises for prayer, they asked among themselves, “What do these people mean by uniting themselves on Sundays?” This was already in 1920 that they started the prayers in this compound. The Koms at that time did not know anything about prayers, except on juju medicines”³³².

The return of Michael Timneng, as described below by his brother, illustrates the tension surrounding the return of the recruits:

“News came to us that my brother and other soldiers were coming. My mother prepared food and sent me to meet them on the way and welcome them. The Fon had ordered that they come directly to the palace, bringing to him all the war booty. I gave them the food and, after eating, they were given the Fon’s message. Some initially refused to go to the Fon, but my brother insisted that they go (...) He led the group to Laikom and tried to make me return home, but I only tarried a bit and followed on their heels.

At Laikom, the Fon came out to meet them. My brother did not remove his cap. While he was talking, the Fon kept watching Timneng’s boots. My brother told him it was a good thing to have been sent to be killed by the Whiteman because, instead of killing him, the Whiteman had taught him the ways of the true and only God and had asked him to come back and preach his message to the Kom people. He showed the true God’s instructions (the German catechism, JdV.). The Fon said it was a good thing, but ordered that they bring him the war booty. He inquired to know why their shoes were so large and was told that they were used to kick people and break their bones and skulls. The Fon requested the soldiers to remove their boots and uniforms and leave them at the palace. My brother swore an oath and told

³³² Timneng n.d. op. Cit.

the Fon that could not be done. It was the first time in Kom history that the Fon's orders were denied to his face.”³³³

The boots of the returning soldiers-turned-Christians were symbols of powers, which in the pre-colonial period could not be ignored. They gave the converts an air of superiority and altered power dynamics in the traditional society once and for all. Apparently, the conflict between the Fon and Michael Timneng was an old one, dating back to a period before the outbreak of the First World War. Timneng seems to have been recruited by the Fon to serve in the German army as some sort of punishment. Evidently, the Fon had hoped that Timneng would not survive the war, having “been sent to be killed by the Whiteman.” A second point worth noting is the apparent confusion on the part of the Fon as concerns the war booty. As noted earlier, the mechanisms of a war between two European powers, fought in part on African ground, were beyond the grasp of the Kom people.

The Establishment of a Chapel at Njinikom and Formation of Christian Village

On their return to Njinikom, Timneng and his Christian followers set about practising their new religion. In the beginning, their activities were limited to doctrine classes, led by Timneng and weekly prayer meetings on Sundays. These activities took place in the homes of the converts or in Timneng's own compound. The non-Christian community took note of the Christian rituals with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion.

Like in Shisong, these converts operated virtually independently of “official” Church guidance and against the wishes of colonial and traditional authorities. Michael Timneng developed a privileged and strong leadership position. He was the only Kom Christian who could read and write and he had little left to lose in terms of his relationship with traditional authorities. The Njinikom Christians requested the appointment of a European priest to guide them, but this request was not granted until 1927. Occasionally, Njinikom was visited by priests from nearby Nso, where the Kom converts

³³³Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994. in De Vries, op. Cit p.51

went for confession and where the entire Christian community from Njinikom celebrated Christmas in 1920.³³⁴

Early in 1921, Father William Bintner, a priest from Luxemburg who had previously played a role in the establishment of the German Catholic mission at Fujua, journeyed to Kom in order to persuade the Fon to allow the Christians in Njinikom to build a church there. After some debate, during which the Fon tried to convince Father Bintner to build the mission at Fujua, the Fon was indeed persuaded to allow the building of a church at Njinikom, but his enthusiasm for the plan was minimal. "He finally accepted, telling the Father that his building of the church at Njinikom was of no use, for these people (the Njinikom Christians) were travellers and would never settle."³³⁵

However, the Fon's permission to build a church was acquired and a suitable location was determined. The Fon agreed that a number of villages would assist in the building of the Njinikom church, providing labour and building materials. Njinikom village was to build the church itself while Fanantui and Babang were to build the catechist's house and the guesthouses. Thus, the building enterprise involved a group of people far larger than the Christian community alone. Father Bintner was present to supervise the building, to provide spiritual guidance for the Christians who attended mass and to teach doctrine classes every morning before going out to work on the building project.³³⁶

The Establishment of the Christian Village

The circumstances leading to the creation of a Christian enclave in Njinikom were spontaneous. Clearly, the Fon might not have fully appreciated the consequences of his action. It gave the converts ample space and time to muster the necessary momentum to resist whatever the conflict had in store for them. Conflict took a variety of forms: conflicts between the converts and the non-Christian population, between the leaders of the young Catholic Church and the traditional rulers of Kom, between the colonial government and traditional authorities and between the colonial government and church authorities. In the opinion of Divisional Officer Duncan in

³³⁴ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

³³⁵ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

³³⁶ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

Bamenda, the re-opening of the Njinikom mission was accompanied by “native disturbances of a very serious nature, which might well lead to civil war.” Duncan’s request that the mission at Njinikom be returned to its former site at Fujua and that religious instruction for women be discontinued until European Sisters could be called in to supervise the education of women in a separate school, fell on the deaf ears of his immediate superiors. Duncan’s handling of the case in Shisong cast dark clouds on his capability as an administrator.

If the Christian converts had limited their activities to Njinikom and to those who had not undertaken tribal commitments, the situation would have been different. However, for some reason, the first group of indigenes to fall into the luring arms of the mission were the Fon’s wives. Not long after the church building was constructed, tension between the Fon and the Christian community came to a head when one of the Fon’s wives left the palace to stay at Njinikom with fellow converts. The story of the woman, named Biwa’a, occupies a prominent place in virtually all accounts of the history of the Catholic Church in Njinikom. She was the first in a long and increasing flow of royal wives who left the palace and embraced Christianity. Their refusal to submit to the Fon’s authority infuriated him and distressed both colonial and church officials through three succeeding decades.

“Before she left the palace, Bertha Biwa’a had been secretly attending doctrine classes in Njinikom during visits to her family there. When she decided to stay in Njinikom, the Fon could not accept such an open affront to his authority and demanded that she return to the palace. Having been informed that Christianity would take away all his wives, the Fon decided to set an example with Bertha to deter other wives from attempting to flee to Christianity. The chindas dragged Bertha away and tortured her all the way to Laikom. Bertha refused to stay at the palace and escaped again to Njinikom. On her return, another delegation of chindas, more fierce, came to get her and my father (Timneng), intervened. He told them to allow the woman to finish her doctrine studies and be baptized before returning to Laikom. He asked that the women be left to choose which way to go”.³³⁷

³³⁷Interview Patrick Tim (Timneng’s son), Njinikom 16.8.1994.

In the catechist's words:

"I told this girl that she was wanted back at Laikom by the Fon. She refused to go back to Laikom and I told the messenger to go and inform the Fon that the girl refused to go (...) Not long after this messenger's departure to Laikom, I ordered two Christians to go to Bansa and inform the Rev. Father that the Fon was trying to withdraw some of the catechumens from the church (...) The Fon in hot anger sent the messenger again back to me. (...) He asked me whether I did not understand that this girl was the wife of a Fon. That if I really wished to detain her for church services or to make her become a Christian, I should pay dowry on her and claim her as my wife. I replied to this man of the Fon politely that we do not pay dowry on girls before they become Christians (...) and that I should wait until the Rev. Father should come before I could pay the dowry."³³⁸

Timneng's refusal to comply with the Fon's orders led to his summons to court in Bamenda, charged with having taken the Fon's wife. Together with his assistant, who had also been summoned, Timneng marched to Bamenda, followed by all the catechumens and Christians of Njinikom. Much to the distress of the Christian community, Timneng was convicted by the Acting District Officer and sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour in the Bamenda jail. His assistant was released. When Timneng had served less than three weeks of his sentence, the Senior District Officer returned to Bamenda and released Timneng, overruling the previous conviction.

Timneng returned to Njinikom and was immediately summoned by the Fon to appear before him at the palace. The ensuing confrontation between the Fon and Timneng, culminating in Timneng's fearless defiance of the Fon's sacred staff, has become a well-known part of Kom oral tradition. The confrontation, which has acquired the status of a legend, is interesting to this case study because it illustrates the way in which Timneng's presumed powers were perceived. Oral tradition regarding Timneng's defiance of the sacred staff reveals the framework within which popular discourse explains not only Timneng's behaviour, but also the events of the twenties as a whole. The crumbling authority of the Fon is clearly associated with the rise of the

³³⁸ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

Christian church and British colonial authorities, but also with supernatural forces. Timneng's alleged wizardry was seen by most informants to have frightened even the Fon himself, an idea that presumably would have been unthinkable in Kom in the pre-colonial era.

Before Timneng appeared on the scene, anyone who aroused the fury of the Fon was pointed at by the Fon with his sacred staff, upon which the subject would be taken away and killed or otherwise punished by the Fon's chindas. Pointing his staff was synonymous to giving orders for execution. Legend describes the staff itself as lethal. According to oral tradition, Timneng was the first person in Kom history to be pointed at by the staff and survive. His apparent immunity to the supernatural power of the staff granted Timneng mystical prestige. In the following fragment, Timneng describes his famous visit to the Fon after his release from prison in Bamenda. As one could not visit the Fon empty-handed, Timneng went to Laikom bringing a fowl.

“He (the Fon) said I had come to poison him. I told him this was not my intention. I added that, in Native Laws and Customs, when a father of a child sends his son to a bad medicine house (juju), his father washes him with water and rubs him with camwood to signify clear conscience. He (the Fon) continued in the same vein and asked, ‘If I sent you to prison because you took my wife, why do you bring me a fowl again? This really shows that you want to do away with me.’ I told him that I did not come to poison him. He said that the fowl should be taken back to Njinikom.”³³⁹

Timneng's description continues thus:

“He (the Fon) told me that he had left the tax of Fanantui and Njinikom for me to collect. That, if the Divisional Officer sent for the tax, he would tell him to come over and visit Njinikom and take it from me. (...) He said I was already ruling Njinikom like a chief. He said that war used to arise in a country because of the Fon's wives and that I (...) was taking his wives and harbouring them at Njinikom. So he would leave Kom for me to rule. I told him that I was not in the family of the Fon, so

³³⁹ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

how could I rule Kom? He repeated that he would leave Kom all for me. He said that there were five of them (brothers) but now only he and Ndi remained and I was putting pepper in their eyes. He must leave with Ndi for somewhere else. (...) He told me that the house I have built at Njinikom is for war, not Christianity and that these soldiers (the Christians standing beside me) were preparing to wage war in Kom. (...) The Fon turned to me and said that we Christians say there is only one God, but he the Fon has eight Gods. That he would never be afraid of a Rev. Father, for who is he? A man like the Father, being a bororo man, with no home, how could he, the Fon, obey him? That he could only be afraid of one with a red cap (a soldier). (...) He shifted towards me with his stick (...) with all assurance of my immediate death. He added that he had no doubt that there was medicine in this church, since I dared to speak to him with no fear. He shifted behind and said: 'If I were not afraid of the English or Europeans who burnt Kom into ashes and the Kom ran into the forest (...) you would not leave this place alive.'"³⁴⁰

Timneng's account of his confrontation with the Fon presents us with a vivid picture of a traditional leader with his back against the wall. Though he was required by the British to maintain control over his people, he was also required to refrain from the traditional sanctions, which, ostensibly, would have enabled him to rid Kom of Christianity and put an end to the threat to his authority. Clearly, the Fon perceived the growth of Christianity under Timneng's leadership as an open attack on his position and even feared violent conflict, referring to the Christians as soldiers preparing for war. Clearly, too, he saw Timneng as collaborating with the enemy, the Europeans, against whom Kom had fought so fiercely in 1906-07.³⁴¹

In a society where the sacred was not separate from the secular, where political power was closely bound up with the spiritual, the introduction of Christianity in many ways tempered the dynamics and balance of power. The Fon did not leave Kom as he had threatened, nor did Timneng collect the Njinikom and Fanantui taxes even though in years to come this function was ceded to a Christian. Timneng did not assume political power or become a chief in the sense suggested by Fon Ngam, but the Ngam's authority had

³⁴⁰ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

³⁴¹ De Vries op. cit.

been dealt a severe blow by Timneng's fearless feat. The Fon's secular power was so intimately connected to supernatural power that it had been practically impossible to separate the two. Now, with the Fon's religious authority challenged, the legitimacy of his previously unlimited power could be called into question. Even if Timneng, as he claimed, had no intention of appropriating worldly power from the Fon, his insistence on religious freedom implied a threat to the Fon's authority in a far wider range of affairs, for the very basis of the Fon's claim to power was being attacked.

The Fon's conversation with Timneng suggests that the Fon harboured genuine fears about the future of the Kom kingdom because, in his view, Timneng's supernatural powers had been enhanced by the support of the Whiteman, as evidenced by his release from prison. The various interpretations of Timneng's power reflect the confusion in Kom with regard to the source of that power and the potential consequences for the Fonom and illustrate the beginnings of a synthesis of Christian and traditional belief systems, a synthesis that offered more or less logical interpretations of the changes in power relations. According to a former palace guard, Timneng's defiance of the sacred staff was proof that he was a wizard although it was essentially the support of the colonial administration that enabled him to act the way he did. "To our greatest dismay Timneng did not die (after being pointed at with the staff). So the belief at the palace at that time was that his witchcraft was superior. But his greater protection was the Whiteman."³⁴² Some interpretations attempt to reconcile the supernatural powers ascribed to Timneng with a belief in the powers of a Christian God.

Disruption of Social Life in Njinikom and the Arrest and Trial of Michael Timneng

With the establishment of a church building in Njinikom, the Njinikom market was also re-established in 1921. The trading and selling of produce and other goods had come to an end in Njinikom when people became fed up with the harassment they received from the Fon's chindas. "Chindas and princes used to take things without offering a farthing and the sellers were

³⁴² Interview Chindo Ngonkoukele (retired chinda), Njinikom 16.8.1994. De Vries OP. Cit. P.

offended and stopped selling things.”³⁴³ The regular, busy church meetings every Sunday provided an ideal opportunity for organized trade. At first, only a few sellers hawked their goods after mass in front of the church building, but soon the church site became the scene of a regular, bustling market after weekly mass. Market activities gave rise to the next open outburst of conflict between the Fon and the Catholic communities. Two of the Fon’s chindas allegedly refused to pay for the guinea corn they had “bought” from two boys at the market. “These warriors took the corn and ate it all and told the boys to go and call God to come and tell them to pay.”³⁴⁴ The chindas were brought to the mission to account to Timneng for their behaviour.

News of the detention of the chindas by Timneng spread quickly and it did not take long for the Fon to retaliate. Much as the Fon resented and feared the Whiteman’s presence in Bamenda, he turned to the colonial power for support in his struggle against Timneng a second time, reporting to the officers in Bamenda that Timneng and other Christian ex-German soldiers were organizing pro-German resistance against both the Fon and the British authorities. He, thus, made clever use of the British fear of pro-German sentiments among the natives, while adding astutely that he had difficulties collecting taxes from the Christians for the Crown.

Charges Against Timneng

The Fon’s claims were not ignored: the British fear of a revival of pro-German sentiments was very real. Timneng was again summoned to the Bamenda Native Court. His trial was a major public event. “The news had gone far and wide and every big man of the clan had been informed to go to Bamenda. The road to Bamenda was crowded with people following to give evidence.”³⁴⁵

According to Timneng during the trial: “The Divisional Officer, called upon the people present to lodge their complaints.”³⁴⁶ He goes on to say “The first report or evidence given against me was that I had spoilt the

³⁴³ Timneng n.d. op. cit.

³⁴⁴ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

³⁴⁵ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng’s younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994. De Vries OP. Cit. P.

³⁴⁶ Timneng n.d. op. cit.

country and caused food not to grow because I had banned the medicines which were being prepared in the houses to make food grow. The Divisional Officer asked me whether I had done so. I told him that it was the law of God that had made the Christians to do away with the primitive fashion (...) The Divisional Officer shook his head in admiration.”³⁴⁷

Further complaints pertained to the use in church of an allegedly stolen drum, the flogging of opponents and the detention of the chindas. Timneng denied the accusations and explained that his only intention was to ensure that those who wanted to attend church were free to do so. Timneng’s explanations apparently satisfied Divisional Officer Hunt for he released the catechist and sent the crowd back home, again publicly contradicting the wishes of the Fon.

Timneng’s release greatly distressed the Fon, who had clearly expected his anti-Christian policy to be backed by government support. Having twice attempted to no avail to recruit the support of the British in his struggle against Timneng, the Fon resorted to his own measures, deciding to have the Njinikom church burnt down or otherwise destroyed. Johnny Ngong, the Fon’s close advisor, went to Njinikom to order the church burnt, but found none of the Christians willing to carry out the order. All the Christians in the neighbourhood were rounded up and imprisoned at the Fon’s palace. Timneng, who had been away on a visit to Nso, heard of the mass arrest and reported to Laikom. He writes “I went straight to where the policemen were in the Fon’s compound (...) the officer asked me who I was and I told him: ‘I am Tim, the person you were looking for at Njinikom a day ago. I have heard that you have arrested my people because of me. I therefore come so that you release them and take me where you want to.’”³⁴⁸

Timneng and the other 17 Christians at Laikom prison were chained, handcuffed and subjected to hard labour and intermittent corporal punishment.

“This was a terror (...) At about 12 noon the Kwifon raised its usual alarm for about an hour and at one o’clock about forty chindas with skinned whips came to beat us while at work (...) The beating was severe. One can imagine forty people beating eighteen in anger (...). The third day, Johnny

³⁴⁷ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

³⁴⁸ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

Ngong and others came and I was severely beaten by Johnny Ngong. As he started, I leaned on the spade handle, which I kept standing and showed my back to him so that he whipped until one of the strings of the whip broke. When he was tired of whipping, he started abuses. He talked and I talked. He claimed that I said that the Fon was going to hell and that, if the Fon was to go, he would follow him. I answered: 'Yes, if you shall not follow my way, you shall surely go to fire.' He said: 'Yes, as I am with the Fon, I must go too where the Fon shall go.'"³⁴⁹

The beatings and pestering could not prevent the imprisoned converts from loudly professing their faith. Of course, their hymns of praise were taken as a provocation:

"Prayers led us through our torments (...) We prayed and sang loudly and even disturbed the whole of the palace (...) On the fourth night Yong Fugeh was sent again to come while we were praying, opened the prison door and whipped us all and said 'if your voice is heard again, Tim, the Kwifon is going to eat you.' On his going out there was applause of loud prayer and singing. He never came again."³⁵⁰

Timneng's Trial and Imprisonment in Bamenda

The imprisonment of the converts at Laikom lasted two months, after which the Christians were transferred to the Bamenda prison. The Divisional Officer summoned the prisoners, the Fon and his advisors to Bamenda for a hearing. Timneng's description of the unprecedented flurry of activities leading to the trial in Bamenda smacks of horror.

"Two weeks into January, we started for Bamenda. There were eight kwifon jujus and the most senior jujus guiding me. They said that they had caught God's people and they are going to kill. We were led to Bamenda with the Fon in our company. The Fon, having enmity with the Babanki, did not sleep there, but we stayed the night there with the policemen and the jujus... We were put in the dock and two Fon's wives were told to stand behind and the same was done to prominent persons among us. There was no police or messenger and the jujus who led us from Kom were the police."³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

³⁵⁰ Timneng n.d., op. cit.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

According to Timneng, he was not given a fair trial, having no opportunity to defend himself against the charges put against him, namely: firstly, spoiling of the country and instructing people not to make medicines; secondly, having given instruction to Christians to beat Johnny Ngong; thirdly, detaining a chinda of the Fon; and fourthly, taking the Fon's wives to the church. For every charge, he was to serve a term of six months together with William Fulmai. The total time of sentence was two years. After his term of two years imprisonment, he was to be exiled and not allowed to set foot in Kom land again. The rest of the people were sentenced from four months to one year. The Fon at last seemed to have succeeded with the Divisional Officer's support in banning Christianity from Kom, thereby putting an end to the threat to his authority. Triumphant, he returned to Kom:

“[The Christians] were sent to prison and the Fon came back home. When the Fon came back home, he invited all Kom people to come with wine. He said they should wash the country because I had spoilt it and that the Kwifon has eaten God at Bamenda. There was great rejoicing all over the pagan race in Kom at that time. They had confidence that God had been eaten and were very satisfied.”³⁵² According to Timneng, the Divisional Officer “was a pagan of first quality.”³⁵³

Intervention by the Resident and Timneng's Release

Owing to the trouble in Kom, the activities of Divisional Officer Duncan and the petitions of Plissonneau, the Resident was forced to intervene. However, the Fon's victory was short-lived. Early in 1922, less than half a year after the conviction of the Christians by Divisional Officer Duncan, Resident Ruxton paid a visit to the Bamenda Grass Fields in connection with the continuing and increasing troubles between Christians and traditional authorities in Nso and Kom. Divisional Officer Duncan had informed the Resident that the mission at Njinikom was entirely in hands of the natives, who give religious instruction to married and marriageable women who now

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid

live in the mission compound. He warned that the Christians had “formed themselves into a political organization disregarding all Native Law and Custom.”³⁵⁴

Earlier, the Resident had disregarded the Divisional Officer’s warnings, commenting that, “friction (...) is everywhere a necessary concomitant to ‘progress’. It is a distemper to be greatly nursed and seldom requires drastic action.”³⁵⁵ Nonetheless, when the distemper failed to subside and Monsignor Plissonneau appealed to Resident Ruxton to review the court cases in the Christianity conflicts, Ruxton went on tour in the Bamenda Grass Fields to attempt to reconcile traditional authorities with their Christian subjects. The Resident found things “not at all” as Duncan had described them and quashed the sentences of all the Christians convicted by the Native Courts, suggesting with diplomatic understatement that the Divisional Officer had been “misled” by the Fons. The Resident found that, contrary to Duncan’s claims, “the people are not with their Fons.” He judged that the Fon of Kom was himself amenable, but listened too closely to a few “evil advisers.”³⁵⁶

Timneng and his followers were released and sent back to Njinikom, where the Divisional Officer, the Resident and Monsignor Plissonneau joined them. According to Timneng:

³⁵⁴BNA-Sd 1921/1, Memorandum from Divisional Officer to Resident, 31.1.1922

³⁵⁵ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Resident to DO, 10.1.1922

³⁵⁶ BNA-Sd 1921/1, Resident to DO, 10.4.1922. Unfortunately, details regarding the review of Timneng’s case are lacking. Apart from Timneng’s autobiography no credible sources are available. The description in court proceedings of a similar hearing, regarding Nso catechist Tangwa, suggest that the proceedings caused a good deal of uproar. In the Tangwa case, fighting between Christians and non-Christians ensued when about 50 Christians, led by Plissonneau, accompanied Tangwa to his hearing. About 250 non-Christians were present. The Fon’s authority was questioned openly at the hearing. (BNA-Sd 1921/1, Provincial Court Case, Kumbo 11.3.1922). The case of Tangwa bears many resemblances to the case of Timneng. In Tangwa’s case, explicit mention is made of the fact that “in former days, Tangwa’s father tried to dethrone the present Fon” (BNA-Sd 1921/1, first draft of a letter (not sent) from DO to Plissonneau, 16.2.1922). Tangwa was jailed in 1916 for allegedly combining religious teaching with military propaganda. He was continually defended by Plissonneau. After the trial in 1921, the British government provided the Fon of Nso with a bodyguard to ensure his safety. (BNA-Sd 1921/1, Telegram DO to Resident, 15.3.1922).

“In the third week of January 1922 we were in the prison of Bamenda to do our two years respectively. While in prison, we worked hard splitting wood and doing other duties. The warders were not afraid that we would escape and sometimes allowed us to take gangs out. In April, one of the prisoners amongst us, Tufoin Njom, said he had dreamt a dream that we were discharged from prison while it was not yet time. The following day while we were out in the forest splitting wood, a warden came running and sweating and said breathlessly that those Christian prisoners were wanted; he said we should not carry any wood. Hurriedly we went to the yard and were ordered to go to the office immediately.

On our arrival in the office, we saw a different District Officer by the name of Mathias. Divisional Officer Ndonga (the pagan) had been given a house arrest by the Resident, we were told. On reaching the Office, Divisional Officer Mathias asked us whether we wanted to go home with the prison uniform or we wanted our clothes. We said we wanted our clothes. That we did and met him in the office. He said that we were to start for Kom at that time. We left and slept at Bafreng, The next day we slept at Babanki... In the morning, the Divisional Officer asked us whether the road was good to Njinikom. We said yes, so he left on his motorcycle and on reaching Belo valley the people heard the sound of the motorcycle and there was a terrifying alarm: “What has Tum brought into this our country? Something to destroy the seed of Kom? A wonderful gun?” There were noises all over the tribe. Men, women and children were terrified to hear the strange sound of a motorcycle. Bold people came out to see and timid ones found their hiding places”³⁵⁷

Humiliation of the Fon and Reopening of the Church

The Resident attempted to no avail to persuade the Fon to adopt a more conciliatory attitude. According to Timneng, the Resident threatened to depose the Fon if he continued to refuse to accept the Church in Njinikom. The Resident said:

³⁵⁷ . Timneng n.d., op. cit.

“I wanted only the Fon to speak. The Fon first said he has not accepted this God palaver in his country. The Resident told him that if he does not agree, he shall be Fon no more. He said, ‘I am pretty old. I have children who are nearer my age. If I die, my son will take over. So do not frighten me.’ The Resident told the multitude that the Fon shall no longer be Fon because he has refused to take from me. Now I shall take one of these persons who was imprisoned and make him Fon. Do you agree? No word was uttered.”³⁵⁸

To prove his acceptance of the Catholic community, the Fon was ordered to come to Njinikom to re-open the church, which had been shut down after the troubles had escalated a few months earlier. Not surprisingly, Fon Ngam flatly refused to perform the opening ceremony. The Divisional Officer sent soldiers to Laikom to enforce his decision, forcing the Fon “at gunpoint” to come to Njinikom to perform the opening ceremony, much to the jubilation of the Catholic community.

“The Fon got midway and delegated someone to do the opening ceremony on his behalf. The commander of the army insisted that he wanted only the Fon and nothing short of that. The Fon came and stood a short distance from the church and asked Johnny Ngongfedoh, who was his spokesman, to open the church. The commander refused again, insisting that the Fon perform the opening himself. The Fon had no choice but to succumb and do as he was commanded. Because of this humiliation, the Fon went back to Laikom and swore that he would never pass through Njinikom again. Whenever he travelled to Bamenda or any part of the North West, he took care not to pass through Njinikom. The politics of animosity between the people of the other ridges, like Fundong, Abasakom and Belo started at that time. The administration’s description of the event was more euphemistic. The Resident proceeded to Bikom, where the relations between Christians and pagans had also been strained to the breaking point (...).meeting at which the Resident, Monsignor Plissonneau and the Chief were present, resulted in the re-opening of the church, but the breach between the Chief and the bulk of the people of the Njinikom quarter remained unhealed.”³⁵⁹

³⁵⁸ . Timneng n.d., op. cit.

³⁵⁹BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1922, p.18.

On the contrary, the coercion of the Fon by the colonial authorities served to worsen relations. The Fon's public humiliation at the hands of the Whiteman was grist to the mill of the rebellious young Christian community and his defeat was celebrated loudly. Likewise, the incident reinforced the Fon's hatred of the converts. The recognition Timneng received from the colonial administration was perceived as a tremendous blow to the Fon: "Government's orders at Njinikom were given through Timneng and the church. The Fon was now reduced to a mere tax collector with great difficulties in carrying out even that task in Njinikom."³⁶⁰

The fact that Timneng was seen to have obtained the support of the Whiteman for his "scheme" was of crucial importance. Both Timneng and the Fon were keenly aware of the need to appease the white rulers. Their religious struggle was not merely a contest of faith, but a competition for power with explicitly political implications. In the colonial context, the support of the strangely powerful Whiteman would be crucial to the outcome of the battle. Still, the victory of the Catholic community did not mean a victory for Timneng personally. Shortly after the church at Njinikom was re-opened, Timneng was transferred out of Kom as his behaviour was seen by church leader Plissonneau to aggravate the conflicts between Christians and traditionalists in Kom.³⁶¹

The situation in 1922 provided the Fon and his supporters with good reason to be apprehensive about the future. The Christian population continued to grow. One of the Fon's wives had run away from the palace to join the Catholic community at Njinikom, setting an example that would be followed by an increasing number of women in the years to come. Floggings of Christians by chindas and vice versa were the order of the day. No longer could the Fon claim an absolute authority over his people. Virtually all communication between Laikom and Njinikom had ceased because the Fon refused to recognize the largely Christian village after the re-opening of the church.

Hostilities between the Christians and the non-Christian population in the Bamenda Grass Fields had escalated to the point that Fons in the area demanded that Timneng and the other mission teachers be sentenced to 15

³⁶⁰ Interview Aloysius Ngomneng (Timneng's younger brother), Njinikom 16.8.1994. De Vries OP. Cit. P.

³⁶¹Ndi 1986

years' imprisonment. Within the span of roughly one year, Kom catechist Timneng had been arrested three times at the instigation of the Fon. Each time, the British administration had overruled the Fon's attempts to stop the growing threat to his authority. After three years of continuous growth and conflict, the Christian community in Kom was still without resident European leadership, the nearest priest being stationed at Nso. In 1922, the mission at Nso was taken over by the British Mill Hill Fathers and a British priest was appointed to Nso, but Njinikom remained without a priest. Fon Ngam petitioned the British government for English priests to be sent to Kom and asked that the present mission be closed because it was controlled by "ex-German soldiers whose sole aim is to disorganize our native system of government and gain power themselves."³⁶²

The British did not grant the Fon's request to close down the mission or even to supply Kom with a priest. The tolerance of the British towards the Christian movement was not unanimous, however, as indicated by the initial conviction of Timneng by Divisional Officer Duncan and the subsequent intervention of the Resident. Duncan in particular was a staunch opponent of the Christian community, considering the mission to be a "Bolshevistic Society" that intentionally undermined both British and traditional authority. In a heated letter to Monsignor Plissonneau, the European leader of the Catholic mission, Duncan indicated his sympathy for the Fon's point of view, complaining that the Kwifon had been flogged by the converts, that the wives of the Fon were "continually seduced" and that unmarried girls were retained at the mission compound, hidden away when the European priests (from Nso) came to inspect the station. The Divisional Officer touched on two closely interconnected themes that were to trouble colonial and traditional authorities until well after the Second World War, namely: conversion and the resulting relative freedom of Kom women and the resistance of the Christian community to both traditional and colonial authority.

The Role of Women in the Conflict

The role of women in maintaining stability in Kom was paramount. Women produced the food in the farm and provided for their children's daily

³⁶²Ndi 1986 op. Cit.

upkeep. To tamper with the role of women was tantamount to attacking the tribe in its most sensitive nerve. The focal point of conflict, not only in the early years of the mission at Njinikom but throughout its history, was surely the competition between church and traditional authorities for the control over women. The mission had a clear interest in converting as many women as possible in order to form Christian families, but failed to perceive the fact that in doing so the traditional fabric of the society would crumble. It did not take Njinikom women long to discover that the church offered them hitherto unheard-of opportunities to escape unsatisfactory marriages or family relationships. At the mission compound, they enjoyed some physical protection and a livelihood relatively independent from their families while they took part in the catechumen training. The power struggle was most blatantly illustrated when the wives of the Fon ran away to the mission.

It is impossible to tell whether the flight of the women to the mission was motivated by a spiritual longing to convert to Christianity or whether their conversion to Christianity was motivated by other perceived benefits. No doubt, various factors were important. Whatever the case may be, the mission's policy towards the runaway women acutely undermined the power that men in Kom traditionally had over their women and the fact that wives and unmarried daughters were granted refuge by the church served to fuel hostilities between converts and non-Christians tremendously. Divisional Officer Hunt summed up the situation in Kom in 1922 as follows:

“The return of the Catholic Mission to Kumbo (Nso, JdV), with its emotional appeal, has attracted many young women to the churches and, unfortunately for peace, wives of chiefs have been among them. In particular, this has been the case with the chief of (...) Bikom, a man of between 50 and 60 with at least 100 wives, of whom some are under 20. Some of these, mostly young, have left him to attend the mission church and refuse to return to him unless he gives them facilities for conversion, of which he will not hear. The result is a bitter estrangement between him and the Christian congregation, of whom some have harboured and more than harboured the runaways, so that he has practically cut off communication with the Njinikom quarter where the church is (...) Seduction of the wives of their people has also helped to set the chiefs of Bansa and Bikom against the mission, although it is possible that more

agitation is made at the seduction of a woman by a Christian than by a pagan.”³⁶³

Colonial officials recognized that having a large number of wives was essential to the Fons’ prestige. In defence of Ngam’s polygamous lifestyle, Divisional Officer Duncan informed the Resident in 1921 that the Fon’s wives “are not kept for purpose of sexual pleasure and are in practice farm labourers.”³⁶⁴ Their role at the palace was not so much a reproductive one as a productive one: the Fon’s wives farmed his land and prepared food for his many guests. It was generally accepted that a Fon’s prestige was to be upheld by his keeping of a large number of wives. Apparently, the fact that the Fon’s own sexual pleasure was at most a secondary reason for his large household dispelled any doubts the Divisional Officer might have had about the acceptability of the Fon’s marital customs. To the people of Kom, however, recruitment of the wives was a cause of disagreement because the girls could not deny the Fon their hand in marriage. This situation, wherein the choice of husband was not necessarily a decision of the bride, was not unusual.

Though some saw marriage to the Fon as a secure and prestigious way of life, many resented being wed to the Fon, particularly because their chances of bearing children would be small in a household where one man was expected to share his bed with hundreds of women in turn. This aspect entirely escaped Divisional Officer Duncan’s attention, however and he claimed that women who ran away from the Fon’s household did so out of laziness and immoral tendencies: “... the young married woman runs away from her husband to mission teachers in order to avoid work, not as a rule because her husband is abhorrent to her. She usually drifts down to big towns on the coast where she becomes a prostitute.”³⁶⁵

³⁶³BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1922, pp.20-21.

³⁶⁴ BNA-Qa/b 1932/2, memorandum from the Divisional Officer to Resident, 29.12.1921.

³⁶⁵BNA-Qa/b 1932/2, memorandum from the Divisional Officer to Resident, 29.12.1921. No other references were found regarding the alleged prostitution of the runaway wives, although in several interviews it was suggested that the desire for sexual freedom enticed women to leave their husbands. An unattached woman is easily equated with a prostitute in traditional Kom culture. Further references to the prostitution of

The case of Bertha Biwa'a, the first of the Fon's wives to escape Laikom for the church and the focus of the increasing conflict between Timneng and Fon Ngam in 1921, has already been noted. Bertha Biwa'a was not the first woman from the palace to convert to Christianity, as the former Nafoin, Naya'a Funkuen, who had been exiled from Laikom due to a conflict with Fon Ngam, had become a Christian during her exile. As she was the most influential woman in Kom, Nafoin Naya'a's conversion proved to be a great inspiration to many women at the palace. As the Fon had feared, at least eight other royal wives followed the example set by Bertha Biwa'a in 1921.

An unattached woman is easily equated with a prostitute in traditional Kom culture. Further references to the prostitution of Christian women are found. Mgr. Plissonneau maintained innocence in the issue, denying any attempt on the part of the church to "seduce" the wives of the Fon, or any other women for that matter, claiming that the church merely offered temporary refuge to those who had run away of their own free will.

The Divisional Officer was not convinced, pointing out that doctrine lessons were held between 6 p.m. and 8 p.m., "when all respectable married women should be at home cooking their husbands' food."³⁶⁶ Plissonneau perhaps saw what he was able to see with his Western eyes, or what he wanted to see with his missionary eyes. The Cameroonians concerned, Christians and non-Christians alike, saw the church as "taking" other people's wives. Christian informants confirm the colonial government's suspicions that the mission station provided women with a freedom of movement that was considered scandalous and threatening to the old social order. On the other hand, several informants stressed that the church did not actively recruit converts among the Fon's wives: "It is not as if the religion was there to take away the Fon's wives. They were influenced by the fashionable way their relatives followed Christianity. Nobody really went to try to convert them or make them leave the Fon. It was their personal decision."³⁶⁷

In 1923, there were no less than twenty-five of the chief's runaway women in Njinikom, four with children by persons unknown and several

Christian women are found in BNA-Ad 1948/22, P. Kaberry to Prof. Forde, 14.12.1945 and in Kaberry 1952: 136 fn.1, but unfortunately further documentation is not available.

³⁶⁶ BNA-Sd 1921, Mgr. Plissonneau to the Resident, 26/11/1921

³⁶⁷ Interview Patrick Tim (Timneng's Son) Njinikom 16/8/1996 De Vries op. Cit. P.

more who were pregnant. There was also a large percentage of the ex-German soldiers of Kom, who had been repatriated from Fernando Po. Hawkesworth, the Assistant Divisional Officer at that time, visited Fon Ngam to discuss the position of the runaway wives. Previously, adultery with a wife of the Fon had been punishable by death for both parties. Now, however, Hawkesworth found the Fon willing to adopt a more conciliatory attitude. They agreed that the runaway wives would be returned to their fathers' compounds and that the ex-soldiers, who were held to be responsible for "seducing" the women, would either return to their compounds or leave Njinikom altogether. The direct result of the agreement between Hawkesworth and the Fon was that the 25 refugee royal wives ran away from Kom altogether. The Fon also expressed a desire that it might be possible to obtain a teacher from Buea or from some country not situated in the Bamenda Plateau. Shortly before the departure of the French missionaries, Father Bintner had discovered that the teacher Mukong had for a considerable length of time exceeded in his powers by using his position to obtain cheap labour. Further, he had developed his own creed, a mixture of Christian and pagan rites, which was at odds with the official traditional Christianity. Mukong was summarily dismissed and Thomas, a native of Nso, was appointed to replace him. Father Bintner in his letter of 1923 informed the Divisional Officer that, "Monsignor, who was very ill at the time in Fouban, had given orders that the R.C.M. Teacher Aloys Mukong at Bekom be replaced by Thomas Ngo."³⁶⁸

The Fon's willingness to negotiate with the Assistant Divisional Officer on this point indicates the extent to which his natural authority had already been eroded. Clearly, the Fon had little choice in the matter, as "traditional" sanctions would not be tolerated by the colonial government. An outright refusal to co-operate with the British would have further worsened his relations with the colonial government without increasing his control over his wives.

³⁶⁸BNA-SD/A/1 Correspondence Father William Bintner to the Divisional Officer 8th April 1923

The Turning of the Tides

In 1925, the question regarding the title of the Roman Catholic mission to the site of the church at Njinikom began to take central stage. The war of attrition against the embattled Christian community of Njinikom that had been set in motion gained momentum. The Catholic mission had no legal title; no rights to land at Njinikom, save the site of the church the chief of Bikom had originally given to the Christians at Njinikom on which to build a church. Reverend Father Moran confirmed the fact that the mission had no legal right to any ground at Njinikom. The Governor had granted a legal title for the site of the church, but the situation in Njinikom had to be regularized. According to the Resident, a proper headman was needed, whose role would be to see to it that cases requiring judicial settlement were sent to Native Court. He also felt that, if possible, the Mission should establish a station with a resident Father at Njinikom. Njinikom had been abandoned to the whims of the Christians after the public humiliation of the Fon there. The Resident concluded with a dire warning to the chief of Bikom, "Please point out to the Chief of Bikom that if he will not administer his Christian subjects, Government will and that his territory and jurisdiction will be taken from him."³⁶⁹

On the June 24th 1924, the inhabitants of Njinikom were all summoned to the Rest House compound and Tossa was formally installed as elder. Christians and pagans alike were warned and enjoined to recognize and respect his authority. The chief's runaway wives were summoned and Father Moran told them that he would no longer allow them to attend the Njinikom Mission. They were advised to return to their fathers' compounds. As long as they remained in Kom, the Fon would not release them as it would be a great blow to his prestige in the eyes of the majority of his people and a bad precedent for the remaining wives. They were given some concessions. If they wanted to migrate to another tribe out of Komland, he would regard them as dead and would be in no position to object to their attending a mission.

With the equation of the women who had fled from their husbands and taken refuge against all norms solved, what was the fate of the men who had been the perpetrators of the heinous crimes? The question of the ex-German

³⁶⁹ BNA-Qa/b 1925/2, memorandum from the Resident to the Divisional Officer.

soldiers repatriated from Fernando Po remained a jig-saw puzzle. According to Father Moran, these men, far from being the beloved sons of the mission, were a constant thorn in the side of the mission and had brought the name of the mission into disrepute, casting dark shadows everywhere. Like the former wives of the royals and commoners, these men had dragged the name of the mission into the mud.³⁷⁰

The Forced Exodus of Women from the Christian Village

With such a show of goodwill, forbearance and even unbounded generosity on the part of the Assistant Divisional Officer, the Fon of Kom was most delighted at these conditions for the first time in a couple of years. He stated that he would pay a ceremonial visit to Njinikom as soon as the church had brought to conclusion its own share of the bargain. A period of two to three months was set aside for the Christians to remove their crops and houses. To further show how magnanimous he was, his estranged wives, once they had migrated out of Kom and so far as they remained out of Kom, were free to marry and to become Christians. The wives of the Fon and the ex-German soldiers expressed their willingness to carry out the terms of the settlement immediately. For once, the Divisional Officer, the colonial authorities and the Christian enclave of Njinikom had spoken with one voice. Despite these shows of goodwill on every side and the air of optimism, the Assistant Divisional Officer warned that, "Although it would be optimistic to regard the mission problem at Bikom as settled, it can at least be said that a condition that has been eminently unsatisfactory for two years has shown definite signs of improvement and the administration of Njinikom has restarted. This settlement was only arrived at after long debate and the greatest care will be necessary in the execution of conditions and the keeping of the parties in their agreement."³⁷¹ The carefully worked out plan by the Fon, the Divisional Officer and Father Moran soon aborted, as it turned out that neither the ex-servicemen nor the Fon's runaway wives disbanded. Consequently, the Fon was unable to carry out his own share of the bargain and the impasse persisted.

³⁷⁰ Fr. Moran (incomplete reference)

³⁷¹ BNA-Sd/A E.G. Hawkesworth, Assistant District Officer, Bamenda, to the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, Cameroon Province 27th of June 1923

Twenty five women went away from Njinikom in June 1923. The colonial administration and the traditional authorities kept a close watch on them. The name of the woman who returned to Njinikom was Nain. Her child was by another man, not the Fon of Kom. She had been given a promise of marriage by this man and was to return to Babungo as soon as possible. This man, Akom, was expected to pay dowry for the woman to the Fon of Kom.³⁷²

Her case was settled by the Resident when he was in Njinikom in 1922. The woman had no intention of making a permanent abode there and it seems the cause of her coming there temporally was fairly reasonable. Father Moran concluded, "Anyhow she will not be in Njinikom again longer than a few days, so that her case will cause no more trouble. This is the only woman of the twenty five who returned to Njinikom. The teacher here and several other people in Njinikom can vouch for the truth of this. If you are here, they are at liberty to come and search for the women; I can safely offer them £5 for each one they get. It is fairly evident then that the chinda who said that a number of them had returned must have had a very good imagination."³⁷³ Father Moran had already sent his calculations to the chief on Sunday morning, as it was rather late on Saturday. The Fon returned them graciously and in addition sent a "small dish" of two chickens and a small goat, for which Moran thanked him and equally reciprocated by sending payment for them the following day. As far as Moran could see, things had improved considerably.³⁷⁴

The people had all given their tax to the headman, Tossam, appointed by the chief to take the tax at Njinikom. The chief had no complaint to the Fathers in Njinikom this time and as far as could be seen, there was no reason for any complaint. The mission and the Fon were on excellent terms.

Rebecca Reyher narrates the reasons and methods of escape from one of her interviews with runaway wives. According to Reyher, extra marital affairs were not uncommon. However, the runaway wife interviewed was willing to tell of "someone else's" method of escape. According to her, "A brother came and the wife gave him two shillings and he led the way under cover of darkness. Occasionally wives could slip out when not under observation.

³⁷² BNA-Sd/A Correspondence from Father Moran to the D.O

³⁷³ Cf BNA-Sd/A Memorandum from Fr. Michael Moran to the Divisional Officer.

³⁷⁴ BNA-Sd/A Memorandum from Fr. Michael Moran to the Divisional Officer.

Once you were “under menstruation”, the Fon would not see you for several days. Immediately you were well, you slipped away, but the Fon would think you were still not fit to rejoin him and that gave you a head start. Running away was a climax, when you were already pregnant and knew it was a matter of time before your disloyalty was discovered. Until then you had a secret lover.”³⁷⁵ According to Reyher, an unofficial Catholic spokesman was more fruitful. He told me that there were about four thousand Catholics in the Bamenda Station parish, about five thousand at Njinikom. He did not measure his words and spoke with complete frankness. “Catholic girls, as well as pagan, want to be married, begin to fret if they are not married by sixteen, certainly by twenty... A lot of infidelity and unnatural vice exists among the Fon’s women...The Fons are crooks, out for their own interests, with the exception of the Fon of Bali. . . . But, if they don’t halt the onslaught of venereal disease, the tribe will die out. . . . The greatest tie between an African Catholic husband and his wife is the child. It takes a lot of grace to keep them together without one.”³⁷⁶

The dangers and uncertainties involved in running away from the palace were enormous. Life at the palace was so unbearable that women were willing to risk severe beatings by running away to something as new and unknown as the Christian church. Some of the women who ran away to Njinikom fled the palace in search of religious freedom. However, not all the women who ran away were Christian converts: many purposefully used the opportunity to escape from unsatisfactory polygamous marriages or, in the case of royal wives, hoping that Christianity would offer them physical protection against the Fon’s chindas.

³⁷⁵ Rebecca Reyher (1952) *The Fon and his one hundred wives* Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York

³⁷⁶ *Ibid* P.41



Bamileke Chief with a harem of wives. It was situations like this at Laikom that attracted the attention of the United Nations.

According to the daughter of Bertha Biwa'a, the first royal wife to flee to the mission at Njinikom, many young women fled the palace to escape the harsh treatment of the older wives. According to her daughter, Bertha Biwa'a was not the Fon's wife, but a princess living at the palace. She had been made a Fon's wife by the older wives in the palace as a form of punishment after she had run away to Njinikom and been dragged back the first time.

"After a very serious beating she was made the Fon's wife by the older women and was beaten with some itchy ivy that could peel the skin. This made her absolutely headstrong and she escaped again to Njinikom even though all the chindas had been put on an alert. Her journey to Njinikom took three days. This was because she could not follow the main path (...)

The last thing she ever wanted was to be a Fon's wife. She hated the way some of the young wives were treated by the older wives. The coming of the church was certainly a relief to her. The older wives were very upset and beat any junior wife who tried to justify Christianity (...) Life at the palace was not that easy. Not that the Fon did not feed his wives well. No, on the contrary, the Fon's wives were the best fed and most privileged in the whole world. But among the women there was a lot of jealousy. Some women are still alive in the palace today without ever having seen the Fon's bed. They have never had children and men were not permitted to enter the women's side of the palace, so the women could not engage in sexual relations, even illegally. The older women appeared to be jealous of the younger ones and beat them up often. Some of the wives were not known by their husband, the Fon. There were really hard times, especially for young girls, at the palace."³⁷⁷

The Fon, due to advancing age, was unable to fulfil his marital obligations. The increasing number of wives, the jostling for the Fon's attention, the yearning for motherhood, certainly provoked jealousy. Life went far beyond food and drink. According to one runaway wife, the Fon's wives were the best fed and most privileged in the whole world. Some women in the palace could go for years without ever seeing the Fon's bed and, consequently, could not have children. As men were not permitted to enter the women's side of the palace, the women could not engage in sexual relations even illegally. The older women appeared to be jealous of the younger ones, who were more attractive and appealing to the Fon and for this reason had them beaten often. Some of the wives were not even known by their husband, the Fon. Times were hard for young girls at the palace.³⁷⁸

However, not everyone shared this view. The description of the lifestyle of the palace wives by a former *chinda* presents us with a different perspective.

"You know women, I am sure. They can always get what they want (...) At that time, there were so many wives in the palace that it was

³⁷⁷ Interview Monica Iytena (daughter of Bertha Biwa'a), Njinikom 18.8.1994. in De Vries OP. Cit. P.59

³⁷⁸ Interview Yindo Mbah (second class chief) Njinikom 15.8.1994 and interview Monica Iytena (daughter of Bertha Biwa'a), Njinikom 18.8.1994 De Vries OP. Cit. P.

difficult to miss them until someone complained. My child, women are just terrible. You know that where there are too many women there is bound to be gossiping, quarrelling and jealousy. Imagine a situation where a fence is overcrowded with goats and you would know that they fight themselves not because their owners are treating them badly. Women you also know are very easy to convince. Look, these are women who had stayed in the palace for so many years without even thinking of going out of control or pointing an accusing finger at the Fon for having so many of them. All of a sudden, Timneng, who had stayed at the same palace with them goes to Fernando Po and comes back with new ideas. These same women buy the idea and begin to behave as if they had been complaining for long. That is how they are.

You see Timneng (...) knew most of the Fon's wives very well and knew how they could be convinced easily. Do not blame it on the Fon. Whether or not the Fon himself was to blame was of little concern to the colonial officials, who viewed with increasing concern the ever-growing flow of refugee wives to the mission. In 1924, Divisional Officer Hunt commented on the intransigence of the Fon, describing him as a 'somewhat solitary and stubborn figure': His trouble is of long standing and likely to be perennial, until the new social order regarding the foretime sacrosanct wives of a chief is accepted, as it will have to be accepted. (...) The Chief is cutting himself off from some 2000 of his people because twenty-five of his numerous wives have left him. (...) His public conduct is now coloured by his fear of the Njinikom quarter and all that it implies."³⁷⁹

United Nations Intervention and Further Exodus of Fon's Wives

The issue of the Fon's wives placed the colonial government in an awkward position. It was perceived as a very strong threat to native authority and the Divisional Officer suspected that it would only be a matter of time before the Fon of Bali and other "big chiefs" were to be troubled by the same fate:

³⁷⁹BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1924, pp.6-7.

“Here lies the stumbling block, to reconcile the freedom of the missions with the sacredness of the chief’s wives, which they feel is a matter vital to their prestige and position (...) On the one hand, one desires to rule indirectly through the Native Administration and, therefore, uphold the authority of the chiefs and on the other hand, one must allow full scope for Christian missionaries who it must be confessed have no love for the Native Administration. The two aims are hard to reconcile (...) It is impossible to let the chiefs use their own methods to prevent a woman from deserting her husband to become a Christian, yet dissuasion and discouragement and even short terms of imprisonment by a Native Court have little or no effect. It is not pretended that this ailment of the body politic is peculiar to this division, but its present effects are all the worse for being a new malady for which no specific remedy has been found. It is apparent that in the cause of progress the chiefs will have to surrender the principle that they can keep inviolate as many wives as they can purchase.”³⁸⁰

The District Officer’s analysis was echoed by the European missionary, Father Moran, in 1924. He stressed that the “woman palaver” was in essence unsolvable, stating that, “The idea of the freedom of women is quite a new and unwholesome thing to most of the chiefs and, until it is at least tolerated by them, we can never hope to have absolute peace. Scarcely a week passes without some complaint coming in from one locality or another.”³⁸¹ Elizabeth Chilver noted that the majority of non-Christians regarded the flight of royal wives as a deliberate reversal of the social order, stating:

“It might be pointed out that the Christian converts, as well, perceived their support of runaway wives to be a deliberate reversal of the social order: they were well aware of the profound impact their behaviour was to have on the socio-political relations in Kom and their behaviour may be seen as a conscious strategy to initiate changes to their advantage by making use of opportunities granted them in the changing colonial context.”³⁸²

³⁸⁰BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1922, p.21.

³⁸¹ BNA-Sd 1923/7, Fr. Moran to DO, 22.8.1924

³⁸² De Vries OP. Cit. P.61

The Demise Of The Christian Village

The young Christian community at Njinikom, under the strong leadership of Timneng, was soon granted the title “*imperium in imperio*” by colonial officials, because of the difficulties encountered by both traditional and colonial authorities in imposing their power there. Throughout British colonial Africa, the concentration of Christians in new settlements around the churches, with the local catechists functioning as both spiritual and secular leaders, was a cause for colonial concern.

Relatively isolated from their home communities and traditional social control, the Christian settlements proved to be loathsome, not only to traditional authority but also to colonial administration. While few officials were as critical as Divisional Officer Duncan, who considered the Catholic community at Njinikom a subversive political organization, many colonial administrators were sceptical about the feasibility of maintaining control in a community that demonstrated an almost complete disregard for both traditional and colonial authority, refused to pay tribute to the Fon and declined to provide the customary community labour. The attitude of the Njinikom Christians was a source of concern to the British administration not only because of the increasing difficulties in tax collection, though this certainly was an issue of considerable importance, but perhaps more acutely because of the implied threat to the traditional authority on which the colonial government depended heavily.

According to the Divisional Officer, the refusal to pay tax, combined with organized obstruction, proved that the ex-German soldiers from Fernando Po have not been idle. Throughout the Bamenda area, the presence of ex-German soldiers at the mission stations continued to trouble British authorities. To some extent, the European priests shared the doubts of the colonial authorities regarding the loyalties of the former recruits. The irritation of the colonial government was compounded by the fact that, in the first years after the war, the European leaders of the missions in the Bamenda Grass Fields were not British. The Resident was led to comment that Monsignor Plissonneau’s Belgian Congo training did not help him in a country under British administration. None of the Fathers spoke English and

one was actually captured and interned by British troops in 1915 though a subject of Luxembourg.³⁸³

It would not be the last time that the nationality of the missionaries would be considered an impediment to effective British control. Quite clearly, the British feared African allegiance to Germany and they had doubts concerning the loyalties of the missionaries. To a degree, these doubts were well founded as the British explicitly intended to use the missions to consolidate British colonial rule by imbuing the natives with British cultural norms and, in a more practical sense, by educating an English-speaking native elite that would both serve in the colonial civil apparatus and act as an intermediary between the two cultures. With missionaries from other parts of Europe and the United States, the British could not rely on the dissemination of British social norms or even English language education.

The administration's doubts regarding the national allegiance of the foreign missionaries were somewhat superseded by fears that an indigenous Christian church would threaten the new hegemony even more than foreign missionaries might. In a plea for European leadership of the Christian community in Mamfe Division, the Resident claimed in 1921 that the "rapid and indigenous growth of a form of Christianity directed by old teachers and pupils of the Basel Mission, uncontrolled by any present foreign influence"³⁸⁴ was cause for concern as political agitation seemed imminent. These fears were reiterated in 1924 when the Resident reported to the government at Lagos that the Basel Mission was in a "derelict condition," stating that:

"The political danger is that the present totally uncontrolled organization, now spontaneous and indigenous and continually growing may become the prey of the political agitator and develop into seditious Ethiopianism even as the recent history of South Africa and Nyassaland shows."³⁸⁵

³⁸³BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1921, p.9. The reference is to Father Bintner

³⁸⁴ BNA-Cb 1918/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1921, p.9. The reference is to Father Bintner.

³⁸⁵BNA-Sd 1923/6, Memorandum Resident to Hon. Secretary Southern Province, Lagos, n.d. (early 1924). The term "Ethiopianism" referred to a nationalist expression of

The fears of the British administrators that colonial authority might be undermined by indigenous Christianity went hand in hand with the fears of traditional authorities, who considered the young Christian communities to be a threat to their previously unquestioned power. In Kom, the steady growth of the Christian community had led to post-war confusion and the repression of Christian activities as well as Stark and public erosion of the Fon's authority. Not only was he unable to carry out the tasks allotted to him by the British government, such as tax collection, but also Njinikom collectively refused to supply him with the customary communal labour. Whereas previously it had been unheard of that a subject of the Fon refused to serve him as a *chinda*, now he could no longer rely on the unquestioning service of his population even at the palace. Increasingly, religious reasons were put forward to justify a boy's refusal to become a *chinda* for the Fon.

Another source of tension was the discrepancy between the ideas of the Cameroonian Christian leaders and the ideas of their European mentors. Colonial records make frequent reference to disputes between catechists and their European teachers, particularly with regard to the extent to which the catechists used their religious authority for their personal benefit. In 1923, for example, Kom catechist Mukong was discovered by Father Bintner to have exceeded his powers as a teacher, having used his position to obtain cheap labour. In addition, he was accused of instructing his followers in a mixture of pagan and Christian rites. Mukong was dismissed and excommunicated.³⁸⁶

A few years later, a catechist was discovered to have flagrantly abused the illiteracy of traditional rulers by producing his mission certificate and claiming that it was a letter from the Divisional Officer ordering chiefs to supply him with scholars and food. The often indirect references to such incidents are important because they suggest a discrepancy between the perception of the European missionaries of the implications of Christianity and the meaning ascribed to the Whiteman's religion by their African adherents. Many early missionaries seem to have been oblivious of the attraction that Christianity had as a vehicle for social mobility and increased

anti-British sentiment, due to the post-war confusion and the repression of Christian activities.

³⁸⁶BNA-Sd 1921/1, Memorandum ADO to DO, The missionary controversy at Bikom, 27.6.1923.

personal power. The prestige accorded to the new religious leaders meant that the catechists and teachers gained access to a source of power that escaped the attention of the missionaries, namely: power over people, particularly the power to organize labour and manipulate the marriage market. Further, the ex-German soldiers far surpassed the European missionaries in their zeal and determination. While for the European missionary, Christianity represented a system of moral discipline and sobriety, for the Cameroonian catechists Christianity was a liberating force. The difference in perception necessarily led to friction between the two groups of religious leaders.

Towards A Common Consensus

The death of Fon Ngam in 1926 and the ensuing succession to the throne by Fon Ndi provided the colonial government with new opportunities to consolidate colonial rule in Kom and to ease the tension between Christians and non-Christians in the Kom kingdom. Just before Fon Ngam's death, the Kom Native Court had been established with his reluctant consent. The transition in traditional leadership opened up possibilities to render the new court an effective tool for Indirect Rule. Further, negotiations with the new Fon were opened regarding the position of the Catholics in Njinikom.

The Catholic Church also took advantage of the change of Fon to improve its position in Njinikom, appointing two resident missionaries, the Dutch priests Jacobs and Stokman, to lead the Njinikom mission, officially established as St. Anthony's Parish in 1927. Under the leadership of the resident priests, educational activities were dramatically expanded. The number of baptized Catholics attending Njinikom church rose accordingly, increasing by more than a thousand in the first year after the appointment of the Dutch missionaries.³⁸⁷ On the one hand, the presence of European missionaries entailed a legitimization of the authority and prestige of the local

³⁸⁷In 1927 the Njinikom Catholic community numbered 1741 people (1017 baptized converts and

724 catechumens). In 1928 the community consisted of 3000 people. These figures are derived from records at the Njinikom Parish Archives, cited in Ndi 1986: 111, 300 fn.13.

catechists. On the other hand, the more or less permanent presence of the ordained priests at the mission station curtailed their independence.



Father Jacobs and Father Onderwater with Ndi, the Fon of Kom

Fon Ndi displayed a more mollifying attitude towards the Christian church than his maternal uncle, Fon Ngam, had done, but his attitude was not reciprocated by a parallel desire for reconciliation on the part of the Njinikom community. Ndi continued to resist the erosion of traditional authority and Catholics continued to insist on their autonomy. Fon Ndi was even more exasperated by the problem of runaway wives than Fon Ngam had been. The presence of European missionaries initially aggravated the conflicts by lending European support to Catholics in court cases and by conferring on the Catholic community a prestige previously lacking. The colonial attitude towards the missions changed, however and became far less pacifying than it had been during the some years before. On the contrary, mutual resentment was rampant and continued to be so, although after 1930 it could not be openly expressed with the missionaries' support.

Following his enthronement in 1926, Fon Ndi expressed his wish to regularise relations with Njinikom. The Divisional Officer considered Ndi's approach to the whole crisis a welcome change, though he greeted the new Fon with apprehension:

“The character of the new chief is the exact opposite of his late brother’s. He is unassuming and wishes to please everyone, which attitude though not so difficult as that of the late chief will, I fear, not be strong enough to keep the peace between his Pagan elders and the Christians without much help from the Government.”³⁸⁸

Ndi began by receiving the catechists and the Christian converts at the palace, thereby re-establishing communications between Laikom and Njinikom. Shortly after his enthronement, he announced that churches would be permitted to be opened in three other populous Kom quarters besides Njinikom for a probationary period of six months, during which the Christians were expected to return to their home villages and prove themselves amenable to the authority of the chief and the quarter heads. By stimulating the establishment of churches in various locations, Ndi hoped to disperse the Christian community at Njinikom. Most people living at Njinikom came from elsewhere and it was considered preferable that people moved back to their own villages and families, practising their religion there. The Christian settlers showed little inclination to leave Njinikom, however, leading the Divisional Officer to describe their attitude as “disappointing in the extreme.” When, in 1930, the majority of Christian converts were still at Njinikom, the Divisional Officer was led to conclude that:

“It is not the full opportunity for the practice of Christianity that appeals to the squatters, but the life at Njinikom where, having broken away from all family control, the only loyalty they show is to a European priest (...) There can be no doubt that the priests are working to this end, the absolute antithesis of Native Administration.”³⁸⁹

A second measure taken by the new Fon in an attempt to improve relations between Laikom and Njinikom was the appointment of a Christian chinda to bring palace orders across to Njinikom. Less than a year after his appointment, however, the experiment was evaluated as a failure; the Christians interpreted the appointment of a Christian chinda to be an “acknowledgement of their existence as a separate political community” and

³⁸⁸BNA-Ad/1a, DIVISIONAL OFFICER to Resident, 10.8.1926

³⁸⁹BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1928, p.18.

proceeded to replace the authority of the elders by a council presided over by the catechist.

The Women Equation in the Christian Village

In Bamenda there were now 40 churches and 4,296 baptized and learners as compared with 24 churches and 2219 adherents in 1922. The Mission, however, had had its setbacks as two “bush” churches were burnt, although in places hardly under full administrative control. The Bamenda Division seems to be the only area where there has ever been overt opposition to Christian proselytism and the cause may be sought in the fact that only there were the chiefs with polygamous households big enough to be affected by the propaganda against polygamy.

On September 28, 1934, Father Jacobs, the Divisional Officer and the Fon of Kom met on certain problems that had long been a source of trouble between the Roman Catholic Mission, its adherents at Njinikom and the Chief. The main source of the problem was the presence of the Fon's wives, who were learning doctrine at Njinikom without his permission. The chief said that he could not under any circumstances agree to them staying anywhere in the Kom area. He had no objection to them learning doctrine elsewhere. An arrangement had been entered into with Father Jacobs in February 1929, but had been cancelled by Father Stokman in May 1930. In view of the many differences between the chief and the mission community, this arrangement could not be revived.

Father Jacobs explained his difficulty in dealing with these women, remarking that their presence was of no advantage to the mission and that the mission would gladly be rid of them. The cases of Juliana Fienbi and Tem-Messi, daughter of Nyssa, Quarter Head of Ketchu, could not escape the attention of the Priest and the Fon. Because of its delicate nature, it was agreed that Juliana Fienbi, who had been betrothed to the chief as a child and was regarded by him as one of his wives, should be allowed to marry Thomas of Bum, a Christian, provided that no dowry was received on her by the man, Kutua, who claimed to have inherited her and to have the right of receiving dowry on her.

The Chief's consent was given on the understanding that Juliana Fienbi would accept to go into exile and not live in the Kom Area. In addition, the first female child of the marriage was to be considered as belonging to him

and he would receive the dowry paid on this child. Father Jacobs agreed and promised to induce Kutua to refund the dowry to Thomas of Bum. Another woman, Tem-Messsi, who had been given to the Chief by her father when she was no longer a child in return for a sum of £11, provided to him by the Chief in connection with a court case, was not regarded by the Chief as one of wives. She was to be allowed to marry whomever she or her father wished and the £11 was to be refunded to the Chief by Nyssa. As a result of this discussion, it was agreed in principle that any of the Fon's wives who wished to "learn doctrine should be allowed to do so and to marry anyone they pleased other than a Kom man," provided that they did not remain to learn doctrine at Njinikom or anywhere else in Kom. The Chief would not and could not accept dowry on them. The first daughter of any such woman was to be regarded as belonging to the Chief, though the child was permitted to remain with her parents and become a Christian. On the child's marriage, the dowry was to be paid to the Chief. Father Jacobs used of all his power of persuasion and influence to induce the Chief's wives to leave Njinikom. The Chief further agreed in principle that he would offer no objection to the erection of Churches in any Sub-town or Quarter in the Kom Area if the request of the Christian community was supported by the Sub-Chief or Quarter Head and Elders of the place in question.³⁹⁰

Christian Village Resistance to Civil and Traditional Authorities

As during the preceding phase of missionary enterprise in Kom, the colonial government was plagued during the reign of Fon Ndi by the persistent refusal of Njinikom Christians to pay taxes to the colonial administration or to supply the communal labour customarily demanded of them. The Divisional Officer's assessment that Fon Ndi was perhaps overly anxious to please everyone, including the colonial government, proved to contain at least a kernel of truth. In 1926, for example, the Fon set something of a precedent by secretly paying part of Njinikom taxes out of his own pocket to meet the government poll-tax demands.

The administration requested that the non-Christian headman, Tossa, be removed as the Njinikom people did not respect his authority, but the Fon could not be convinced to comply. Attempts made to bring the "squatters",

³⁹⁰Interview between Father Jacob and the Fon of Kom

as the settlers at Njinikom were termed by the Divisional Officer, under the control of their own families and elders by stipulating that they should pay tax to their own family heads failed. Njinikom church leaders established their own judicial council and decided to take control of the tax-collection, bypassing the traditional elders and giving rise to large-scale tax evasion:

“Great confusion resulted. One Christian was appointed to collect tax from the converts and another from the catechumens. As many of the Christians resided in other quarters or outside the actual bounds of Njinikom, these men had no idea of the numbers from whom they should collect and numerous evasions resulted. The authority of the elders had been so weakened that they did not even know who was living in their respective areas (...) By November, a large proportion of the tax was still outstanding and the chief of Nkom attempted to elucidate the situation by taking a new census. Despite the presence of the A.D.O. at Njinikom, the chief encountered passive resistance to this attempt and the efforts of the inhabitants were more directed towards the suppression of than the supplying of information.”³⁹¹

A second census, taken by night, resulted in 25 convictions in the Native Court for tax evasion. The Christian *chinda* was accused of hiding taxable males and was sentenced to one month's imprisonment with hard labour. Before the matter could be investigated and settled in accordance with the wishes of the colonial government, Fon Ndi had, “with mistaken zeal in order not to be late,” again paid the whole of the Njinikom taxes out of his own funds. Not only was the collection of government taxes problematic in Njinikom, but also the organization of labour. The construction of the Njinikom road, for example, was delayed because Christians refused to do their share of the work. Only when the resident priest commanded them to do so, did the converts turn out to dig their portion of the 18-mile road, only to complain afterwards that the pay they received was inadequate. The refusal on the part of the Christians to provide labour for community projects and for the upkeep of the Fon's palace and farms continued until well after the Second World War.

³⁹¹BNA-Cb 1924/3, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927, p.9

In May 1927, Kom Native Court was established at Laikom, where it was presided over by the Fon. Christians had opposed the opening of the court to no avail and refused to supply labour for the erection of the court building on the plea that the maintenance of the church and the unpaid labour demanded by the missionaries absolved them from such duties. The Christian community refused to acknowledge the application of Native Law and Custom as interpreted by the Native Court, complaining that they were being unfairly judged. According to colonial officials, however, these allegations were “entirely unfounded.” The government appointed a Christian member to the Court to ensure that the Christians were heard, but he was soon dismissed since his position was seen to encourage the Christians in their conviction that they formed a privileged community, politically separate from the rest of Kom. In the words of Divisional Officer Hook in 1935:

“It is evident from reviews and appeals against decisions of the Native Court that the local native, already a self-willed and stubborn type, becomes even more so after embracing the Roman Catholic faith and appears to be under the impression that he can totally ignore all native law and particularly that relating to inheritance and ownership of land.”³⁹²

While in the early 1920s the colonial government had demonstrated substantial tolerance towards the Christians in the various conflicts with the native authorities, the administration’s attitude in the 1930s was much less accommodating. Differences of opinion could no longer be glossed over as being the outcome of culture conflict and misunderstanding because, in this period, the exponents of the controversial attitudes towards the native authorities were themselves Europeans.

Missionaries and the Native Court

After nearly a decade without a resident priest, as of 1927 the Njinikom Christian community could rely on daily guidance. The Christian community now often saw its actions legitimated by the presence of a white priest, who the Catholics considered to be on the same side as the white colonial

³⁹² BNA-Cb 1934/1, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1935, p.11.

administration. Increasingly, since the establishment of the Kom Native Court and the arrival of European priests in Njinikom, the Christian community tried to avoid dealing with the native authorities, preferring to deal directly with the British administration through European missionaries. The problem was closely connected to the troubles regarding the control over women. In particular, the numerous marriages contracted by Christians without going through the customary formalities were considered a slight to the native authorities: Christians applied for marriage licenses through the missionaries so that, in many cases, the village heads did not even know the marriages had been contemplated.

Indeed, the behaviour of the European missionaries frequently was cause for irritation on the part of both native and colonial authorities. The Dutch Father, Jacobs, had scarcely set foot on Njinikom ground when the Divisional Officer accused him of attempting to influence the Native Court, resulting in the imprisonment of a man who had forcibly retrieved his daughter from the mission. The Resident called Jacobs' performance a "bad case of unwarrantable interference" with the courts and his dealings with the Fon "more than a little indiscreet." Father Stokman, also at Njinikom, further riled the colonial authorities when, in another case, he obstructed Native Court action by proceeding to the scene of the trouble and holding an inquiry, collecting testimonies and complaints.

While during Fon Ngam's rule the local catechist Michael Timneng had been held responsible for the ever-increasing tension between the Christian community and the traditional authorities, the colonial government now attributed the difficulties to the alleged unsuitability of the European priests concerned. In the case of Fathers Stokman and Jacobs, the missionaries' foreign nationality was considered to detract from their suitability. The fact that they were not English meant, according to Divisional Officer Duncan, that, "it is extremely difficult for them to understand our methods."³⁹³ In fact, the Mill Hill mission as a whole was opposed to the British system of Indirect Rule, regardless of the nationality of the priests concerned, because Indirect Rule was based largely on the authority of chiefs, who invariably had large, polygamous households.

³⁹³ BNA-Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1930, p.61

Runaway Wives of Royals and Commoners

After Fon Ndi's death, both royal wives and the wives of commoners followed on a large scale the example that had been set by runaway wives during Fon Ngam's reign. Soon after the establishment of the Kom Native Court, the native authority declared that all runaway wives living at the mission compound would be served a civil summons - unless they returned to their fathers until they were able to find Christian husbands who would refund the bride price previously paid for them. The priest at Njinikom recognized the native authority's decision and instructed his catechists that they would be dismissed if they were caught providing runaway wives with refuge, leading the Divisional Officer to conclude, optimistically, that the practise had ceased. The Divisional Officer's conclusions were unfounded though. Throughout the remainder of the mission's history, wives continued to run away and seek refuge at the mission.

The phenomenon of runaway wives was not limited to the Bamenda Division and it caused the colonial government increasing concern throughout the British trust territory. The women's decision to leave their husbands was in itself not problematic to the administration; rather, it was the invariably ensuing conflict, involving husbands demanding the repayment of the bride price and the church's inability or refusal to do so. While in the 1920s the colonial government had been perturbed by the asylum granted royal wives, in the 1930s the concern related to women from all segments of the Kom population.

The Control over Women in the Christian Village

Both married women and young girls left their homes to reside at the mission compound. Their position was precarious and ill defined. The missions tried to marry the women off to Christian men, but these were not always available or able to refund the bride price demanded. In addition, the mission policy to restrict Christian marriage to those who had received baptism meant that the candidates had to attend doctrine classes at the mission for an extended period, sometimes several years, before being able to marry. A woman's decision to leave her polygamous husband almost inevitably entailed her marriage after a considerable delay to a Christian, not necessarily of her own choice.

In 1928, the Divisional Officer of Mamfe Division described the position of a woman who had become Christian as “impossible”, explaining that the troubles resulted largely from the custom of infant betrothal. “After paying a considerable sum and waiting for some fifteen years, (a man) cannot be expected readily to abandon his wife to the mission because she has become a Christian (...) It is known that the mission authorities consider conditions which prohibit women from marrying the men of their choice disgraceful, but custom cannot be changed in a day”.³⁹⁴

The Divisional Officer’s sympathy for the cause of the Cameroonian man, who saw his dearly purchased wife disappearing into the grips of the mission, is typical for the attitude of the colonial government towards the mission’s refugee policy at that time. Earlier, the colonial administration had been particularly concerned with the runaway wives of the Fon and the resulting erosion of his authority, but now the government’s concern focused on the common man’s dissatisfaction and the potentially disruptive undetermined status of the runaway wives. The issue of “stray” women posed a threat to all kinds of established patriarchal authority — church, colonial and traditional — namely that women were no longer directly under a readily identifiable source of control. An unattached woman was virtually unheard of and a prospect nervously avoided by both colonial and church authorities. There are many cases of women who were sent back and forth, from church to father to former husband, by authorities anxious to have them under some recognized authority. In one instance, the mission’s response to the increase of runaway women was to establish a settlement especially for them near Baseng, where they stayed anywhere from a few weeks to a year or more. The purpose of the mission settlement was, in the words of the Divisional Officer, to establish control over the women until their position had been “regulated.”³⁹⁵

In 1921, reports described the position of women as “worst”. Further, eight of the Fon’s wives had been seduced. Increasingly, the government attitude towards the missions with regard to the runaway women was one of impatience. Exasperated by the Church’s involvement in marriage affairs, the colonial administration termed the mission a “marriage market.”³⁹⁶ The

³⁹⁴BNA-Sd 1928/4, Divisional Officer Mamfe to Resident, 25.9.1928

³⁹⁵BNA-Sd 1930/1, Divisional Officer Kumba to Resident, 16.10.1930.

³⁹⁶BNA-Sd 1928/2, untitled report, 1928

Divisional Officer complained in 1930 that the priests were blind to the moral danger involved when women left the “discipline of the family,” maintaining that such women were “extremely likely to contract irregular liaisons.” Divorce itself, he claimed, was not a problem to the natives, but rather the fact that the husband concerned had little or no chance of recovering the bride price, at least not for the duration of the woman’s preparations for baptism.

The Nun’s Story and United Nations Intervention

In 1949, the Fon of Kom was confronted by a mass exodus of royal wives from the palace. A precedent had been set in this regard in earlier years, set in motion by events closely connected to the missionary presence at Njinikom. The mass exodus of wives in 1949 was prompted by the visiting mission of the United Nations Trusteeship Council and (reluctant) interventions by the colonial administration. Trouble at the palace began to brew after an article describing the Fon’s marital habits, written by a nun at Nso, was published in a missionary periodical in the late 1940s. The article was largely a fantasy of the nun’s imagination, but contained enough truth to resemble the situation at Laikom and infuriate the Fon, who complained that his marital affairs were of no concern to outsiders. Nonetheless, the article caught the attention of the United Nations Trusteeship Council, which demanded that an inquiry be held into the Fon of Kom’s marriage customs.

The colonial administration was none too pleased with the international attention for the Fon of Kom, attributing the concern to “missionary hysteria.”³⁹⁷ Describing the Fon’s wives as the best-fed, most beautiful women in Kom, pampered and proud, the Divisional Officer complained:

“The administrators are and have been for many years, aware of the marriage customs of the Tikar Fons. It is essential to the welfare of the tribe that the Fon should be presented with virgin brides and, for this reason, there is a very deep popular support for the customs that make this possible (...) The Fon’s wives themselves are almost all happy to adhere to custom and those who do not wish to enter the Fon’s compound are not forced to do so. Every man and woman in Laikom is free to approach the Divisional Officer

³⁹⁷Rebecca Reyher (1952), *The Fon and his One Hundred Wives*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, New York

and, if his or her liberty is threatened, immediate steps are taken to provide redress. The marriage customs do not interfere with the liberty of the subject.”³⁹⁸

The administration’s attempt to avert international intervention failed, however and the Senior District Officer was obliged to visit Laikom himself, in anticipation of the visit of the Trusteeship Council and impress upon the Fon’s wives that they were free to leave the palace should they want to. Having heard that they would receive protection from the Divisional Officer if they should leave the palace, nearly 50 royal wives fled, mostly to Njinikom. In the words of one runaway’s daughter:

“At that time in the palace, there were 150 wives, not including old women. (...) The Fon had sent his most stubborn and eldest son, Sama, to school. When he finished his studies, he had the ears of the Whiteman. He told them there was a lot of abuse at the palace as the Fon was increasing the number of his wives just as a herdsman would increase the stock of his cattle. He came back to the palace and explained to the Fon’s wives that they were being abused (...) He told them that they had a right to revolt and that the Whiteman would be on their side if they did (...) The Nafoin bought his idea and teamed up with him to persuade the young wives to run away. This campaign was further strengthened when the Whiteman came to the palace. They interviewed all the wives and were surprised to notice that more than half of those women had never had sexual intercourse with the Fon. Some of them had been to the Fon’s bed only once or twice (...) The Whiteman, Tifi (the Nafoin) and Sama Ndi, the only educated prince, in one day caused forty-three of the Fon’s wives to desert him. Some of them, who were afraid of the chindas, did not stop over at Njinikom for purification and some never came back to Njinikom at all (...).”³⁹⁹

³⁹⁸ BNA-cb 1948/1, Annual League of Nations Report 1946-47, p.16

³⁹⁹ BNA-Sd/A Interview Princess Immaculate Mulessim, Njinikom 19.8.1994. It is interesting that, according to oral tradition, the lack of sexual opportunities was seen by the colonial officers as a justification for escape from the palace, whereas in the 1920s, the lack of sexual activity between the Fon and his wives was considered to be a justification for maintaining the polygamous household.

In November 1949, the Fon received the visiting mission of the Trusteeship Council. He addressed the mission, protesting against the alleged misrepresentations in the press regarding his domestic affairs and handed the delegates a petition.

“Where lies the need for the DO, who is not Bikom and who knows very little of the eventual progress at Bikom, to force me to abandon my way of life and to take his, which is entirely unknown to me and not wished for? (...) Peace of mind is gone of my people and me. This is so because of the mixture of cultures. The Whiteman has come with his and we seem to abandon ours for the new one. This new one, we do not know. If in due course we come to know and appreciate it, we shall unanimously demand the introduction. But no, until we make the demand ourselves (...) There is no reason why we shall now be able to manage our affairs better than we used to before the advent of this civilisation (...) I had and I must have servants in the Kwifon compound. Without them, I am unable to fulfil my duties.”⁴⁰⁰

The Fon of Bikom, who never left his mountainside, was not prepared for a global stellar role. It came like a bombshell. First reports gave him six hundred wives, but that proved to be an exaggeration; about one hundred is more nearly correct. When Rebecca Reyher arrived at Laikom, she found that no one man, not even a king, was able to withstand the forces that everywhere were giving women the courage to follow their hearts' desire. Fifty-four of the Fon's wives had run away! This was a story about the Fon and his one hundred wives, but curiously, it had its beginning in the Mid-West of the United States with a slight English girl completing her eleventh year at a Dominican convent in Chicago. A barely perceptible air of difference about her was traceable not only to her delicate beauty but to her accent: the pulses were unmistakably American. Tiny and fragile, she managed to move rapidly, to cover a lot of ground, to push through an extraordinary amount of work, to demonstrate her sincerity and devotion in choosing to teach in distant obscurity. On her twenty-first birthday, she was far from Chicago and her family was in England. She was a nun on her first

⁴⁰⁰BNA-Td 1950/9, Petition from the Fon of Kom to UN visiting mission (T/PET.4/36), 20.11.1949

assignment in British West Africa. With each year spent in Africa, the sister grew closer to her black pupils, more intensely aware of their difficulties and problems. No day was long enough to crowd everything in. There was so much that could not be done and that was what troubled her.

A pupil drawn to the Catholic faith was often unable to spend her life as a convert within it. Frequently the parents of the girl had pledged her in marriage while she was a child and she was the acknowledged property of her future husband. By her thirteenth or fourteenth year, the groom would expect to take possession of the girl. If the man were of high estate, it was not even possible to negotiate with him; the girl had to be delivered on demand. These were not anonymous case records to be noted and filed. The sister had nursed and tended these girls through illness, taught them to read, write, sew and cook and seen them grow and develop. Now, these were her frightened children and they looked to her for escape. It was she who had taught them their catechism, the living reality of the first lesson. For time without count, polygamy, forced marriage and dowry payment given and accepted for girls' "bride price" had been the law and custom of Africa. Rebellion usually proved fruitless. Overzealous church workers sometimes found themselves transferred to other territories or cautioned by their superiors to act with less impulse and more discretion. What was gained by protest to save one, they were told, if thereby opportunity were delayed, or lost, to save many?

Helpless indignation churned and finally boiled over in the distressed nun. Unburdening her heart, she reported the circumstances of native marriage as she personally knew them, or had heard of them, in a composite, symbolic story that centred on the Fon of Kom, Bamenda Province, the British Cameroons, reputed to have six hundred wives. "Just Cargo" was one of a series of stories sent by her to the official organ of her order, a paper of limited circulation. A busy nun must always look to the future, renew her strength and refuel her courage. Once written, the story was forgotten. In a few weeks, however, the thirty-two year old nun and the Fon were making international headlines. The nun's graphic story about the Fon had given them dynamite to reanimate their long campaign against the injustices of African marriage. With the fanfare of publicity, they charged that the Fon's polygamous establishment and forced marriages in a mandated territory were contrary to the human rights guaranteed in the United Nations charter. They demanded that the UN take some action.

Front pages of the New York Times and the Herald Tribune carried cable dispatches from their London offices. Editorial comment snowballed. Newspapers all over the world had something to say about the Fon and polygamy. Officials of Nigeria, Great Britain's largest colony, responsible for the administration of the neighbouring Cameroons and the bishop began to be bombarded with letters. The Colonial Office initiated investigations. The excitement generated by Sister Loretta's story was the final sequence of years of organized protests by international organizations and high-placed individuals of all faiths, originally poured into the unheeding ears of the League of Nations, who reiterated that government officials did not usually come in contact with native women and were poorly informed about them. The protestors were consistently ignored.

British women looked with envy on French victory; theirs had been a parallel but unrewarded struggle. Soeur Marie Andre du Sacré Coeur, missionary of Our Lady of Africa and one of Cardinal Lavigerie's White Sisters had written a story, too. Her book, *La Femme Noire en Afrique Occidentale*, passionately summarized several years of research. The first nun in history to appear before the French Chamber of Deputies, Soeur Marie pleaded with them to safeguard the basic rights of African women in French colonial territories. By her eloquent sincerity, she was able to wipe out indifference and crystallize traditional justice into action. A decree embodying radical changes in custom and practice was adopted by the Chamber and signed by the President. This was June and World War II was declared in Europe and Africa the following September.

Provisions of the decree, which applied to all the vast French colonies in Africa, declared that "consent of the parties concerned" was indispensable to the validity of marriage and any contracts or agreements pertaining to it. Further, it nullified all claims on widows by the deceased husband's family. Widows were usually inherited by the estate. Legally, thousands of African women had achieved human status. Sister Loretta had written about the plight of girls in the British Cameroons, which are adjacent to the French Cameroons where the new decrees applied. In the British Cameroons, where native law and customs prevailed, the British depended on the indirect rule of chiefs as the mainstay of discipline and authority. At least half of Sister Loretta's pupils came from the French side and were covered by the new regulations.

At Lake Success, the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations gave belated consideration to the petition that had been before them for some months past. The Council was confronted with the Fon's reputed six hundred wives. What was it going to do about them?

Thirty-five-year-old bachelor Awni Khalidy of Iraq, a country where a man may have several wives but must show delicate restraint, suggested that perhaps the Fon was more in need of pity than censure and that he should be left to suffer in his own way. The Russian delegate sharply disagreed. The delegate from China, where they have less advertised plural marriage, reminded the Council that any action taken could be interpreted as disapproval, but not as censure, since this was not a custom introduced by the Governing body. That made it clear that Great Britain had not inspired the large-scale romantic fancies of the Fon.

Proudly referring to himself as coming from the only Christian country in the Orient, the delegate from the Philippines insisted on decisive, immediate action. Supporting him was the Mexican delegate, who reminded the Council members that with their attitudes it would once have been impossible to suppress cannibalism. Encouraged by this more earnest tone, the delegate from the Philippines referred to confidential memoranda. Rumour in the Cameroons had culminated with a case in court: the Fon's devoted son was accused of commandeering girls not yet thirteen as future wives for his father. The Fon's wives began to evolve from statistical ciphers to creatures of flesh and blood,

What years of persistent pressure had failed to accomplish, one frenetic story by the sister had made possible. A great international body declared the marriage circumstances of African women an area of its concern. It was agreed that a commission of the UN Trusteeship Council would personally investigate the multitudinous household of the Fon. The trip to the Fon was on a grand scale. A cavalcade of equestrians and stragglers escorted the UN party twelve miles up the mountain to the village of Laikom. Altogether, there were about two hundred men, including all the top officials, the Commissioner of the Cameroons, the Acting Resident and the District Officer. It was about ten in the morning when they arrived, about three in the afternoon when they departed.

Sandwiched between the dances and entertainment in their honour, the Commission had a private session with the Fon and his elders. Nitpickers for impartiality and justice, they asked to be left alone with no government

officials present. The Fon's son, Sama Ndi, fluent in English, acted as interpreter. He had recently been acquitted for lack of formal evidence of kidnapping and forcibly holding a girl of twelve for his own, or his father's, pleasure. Indignantly, the men of Laikom refuted the calumnies that had been heaped upon them. They declared themselves determined to live according to their own traditions with as many wives as suited them, which had been the way of their ancestors. A petition signed by thirty-nine of the Fon's wives, complete with thumbprints, was presented. This stated that they were living in peace and contentment and objected to any changes that might be introduced. The women who found their position intolerable, but were unable to escape from it, were clearly unable to reach the Commission. Home again at Lake Success, the UN mission bowed out, announcing that the Fon's private life was outside their jurisdiction.

Reyher decided that it was not yet time to put the matter to rest and decided to pursue the issue. According to her:

"I was haunted by things I wanted to know. How did it feel to be one of the Fon's wives? What did the wives really want? Since I had learned of the heartbreak in polygamy in another part of Africa, in Zululand, I was wary of official opinion. I knew that where people are involved there are conflict and emotion to be reckoned with. What passes for scientific detachment so often is officialdom untouched by vagrant ripples of sympathy. This was a test case, affecting perhaps the future hopes and happiness of millions of women. There are no easily procured figures on how many people practice polygamy, but the areas in which it is customary includes several hundred millions of men and women. I felt it imperative to examine well the conclusions of those who accepted polygamy as satisfactory for other women."⁴⁰¹

The Fon's petition was accompanied by one signed by "the women of Kom", who protested against the negative reports about the Fon's marital habits, stating that, "We are very happy to live with our husbands. We do not

⁴⁰¹ Rebecca Reyher (1952), *The Fons and his One Hundred Wives*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden city, New York.

grudge sharing husbands, we live with them happily.”⁴⁰² Interestingly, the Fon demanded to know, “What fairness is there for the Divisional Officer to order an exodus of my ex-wives without a refund of dowry?” The introduction of bride price in the discussion of royal wives is a new and significant element. Oral testimonies consistently repeated that bride price was of no relevance in royal marriages. Marriage to the Fon was a compulsory obligation and not rewarded by marriage arrangements in any way. Yet as wives left his household in increasing numbers, the issue of bride price cropped up in colonial reports, suggesting that the commoditization of marriage was not limited to commoners’ marriages. The importance that bride price achieved in the Fon’s economic affairs is suggested by a reference in the Annual Report for 1950-51. Referring to the Fons of Kom and Bum, the Divisional Officer described the two elderly Fons as “eking out their days fortified with the knowledge that steady income can still be provided, for dowry claims on the women who have left their households under the more relaxed conditions obtaining nowadays.”⁴⁰³

The mass exodus of 1949 set the scene for continuous desertions from the palace in later years. The Fon’s authority had been whittled away to such an extent that he complained in desperation to the Divisional Officer that he could no longer perform his state duties because of a lack of wives:

“Nearly all my wives have deserted me and scattered about everywhere in Kom against the Kom Native Law and Custom (namely) that no Fon’s wife is allowed to stay anywhere in Kom other than the Fon’s compound. Nobody has any right to converse with the Fon’s wives except their relatives. But now the Fon’s wives go about the town contrary to the custom. Their duty to the Fon is to cook food for the Fon, to entertain the people visiting him (...) Now I suffer tremendously for want of food for the entertainment of Kom and the strangers visiting me which badly tells on me (...) I know this matter is in the Kom Clan

⁴⁰² BNA-Td 1950/9, Petition from the women of Kom (T/PET.4/38), n.d. (autumn 1949).⁹⁴

⁴⁰³ BNA-Cb 1949/1, Annual Report Bamenda Province, 1950-51, p.19.

Council and I am only begging the DO as my supporter and adviser to lay stress on it so as to accelerate the return of my wives (...).⁴⁰⁴

With the passage of time, with assessment and reassessment reports, the tides of the 1920s against the traditional authorities seemed to have taken a different direction. For years, the Fon had complained that Divisional Officers treated their cases against the mission with bias, now it was the turn of the missions. Generally, the turning of tide seemed to have blown over the whole territory. The cases of trials and convictions in the Kumba Divisions and the highhandedness of some the priests in the mandated territory convinced the government that there was more than what was apparent. With many interviews between the chiefs, the priests and the Divisional Officer, a new way forward became evident. Certainly, the actors were changing; time had done its best to smoothen the rough edges of relations between the different actors.

Further Strife and Dissension In We Christian Villages

In the early part of 1930, the chief of We made a complaint against Father Schmidt. Father Schmidt had dared to cross-examine the chief of We on the case of a Christian named Tim and had publicly tampered with the

⁴⁰⁴BNA-Md/e 1956/1, Fon of Kom to DO (Wum), 16.11.1959 Rebecca Reyher reports that In the late twenties a Bikom woman went to the Father at the Njinikom mission, stating that she wanted to become a Catholic. She admitted to being six months pregnant. The Father was anxious to discover her real motives for coming to him. "Is it because you want to escape punishment, perhaps death because you, a Fon's wife, have had a child outside his compound?" he plainly asked. "I am afraid of what may happen to me. But I am sincere in wanting to become a Catholic," she replied with convincing simplicity. The father took her into the mission station. She became a devoted student of doctrine, never going anywhere. When she was due to have her baby, the Father, fearful of a plot upon her life, ordered her to remain in her hut. Temporarily, he had installed her in a hut but one hundred yards from his own so that he might keep a vigilant eye out for trouble and hear any unusual sound. The woman gave birth to her child and shortly thereafter, she and the child died. There was no apparent reason for the death, for the birth had been a normal one. Three of the king's women, older wives, who came to assist her with the birth, uninvited, unannounced, had quietly come and gone.

judgement of the Divisional Officer. One of the consequences of this extra judicial activity against cases that had officially been concluded by a competent authority was a deputation of Christians from We who came to Njinikom at the time the Resident was visiting with the aim of meeting him and reopening the case. Besides the deputation, the case was bound to arouse some degree of animosity between the Chief of We and his Christian population. Father Schmidt's actions were considered a tactful show of excess zeal. Father Schmidt's actions stemmed from his refusal to distinguish between common law and German law. "It was a matter of extreme difficulty to make a primitive native who has been converted to the Roman Catholic Faith understand that there was a difference between the two sets of law."⁴⁰⁵

While replying to the statement of slander of the chief of We, Father Anton Schmidt agreed that the Chief of We had sent one fowl and seven or eight hands of plantains and that he did not allow the chief to come on the veranda as it was not their own custom to let natives enter their houses. Father Anton Schmidt castigated the local chief for obeying the instructions of the Divisional Officer by returning a woman to her Mother's compound. He added that the chief was a bad chief, as he disliked the Catholic Church. Father Schmidt admitted that he was in an angry mood. He is said to have ordered the chief to come when rain was falling. The woman had been staying at her mother's compound after the order of the Divisional Officer, but Kwe took her from there to Bali.

Kwe married her publicly in the Basel church at We after the decision of the Fungom Court, shortly before leaving We. According to Father Schmidt, "it is at least doubtful: that Kwe was baptised at the moment of his marriage and if he was, it would not alter the case: a non-Catholic cannot marry a Catholic".⁴⁰⁶

In the opinion of Father Ivo Stokman, the chief could also have taken up in his complaining the disagreement he had expressed with his previous order that he did not agree at all with his previous order to give divine honour to a hat on a bamboo. For that order, many Christians suffered flogging which led to their departure from the village. From a chief of such

⁴⁰⁵Memorandum No B.125/5 from the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division to the Resident Cameroons province Buea 26th of June 1930

⁴⁰⁶BNA-Sd Correspondence from the Father Superior Njinikom Mission to Divisional Officer Bamenda 9th June 1930

hostile mentality, Father Stokman was not inclined to accept any food and had to show his disgust by sending the food back.⁴⁰⁷ During the visit of the Resident to Njinikom in May of 1938, Father Stokman officially invited them for lunch while at the same time pleading with the Resident to set aside time for them to be by themselves without the Divisional Officer.⁴⁰⁸

Before the Resident's visit to Njinikom in 1930, Father Stokman, "as superior at Njinikom Mission, living among Kom people", sought to allay all fears and misgivings by extolling the virtues of the Christians of Njinikom. He explained that, in 1929, the people of Njinikom and Fanantui dug more than four miles of the 18-mile new road in Kom and that of the 160 pounds given to the chief for the road, only 12 pounds had been offered to them. The Njinikom Christians insisted that they would receive nothing less than the total amount of money due them. They threatened that, unless their full share was given, new orders for road works would certainly be ignored. Father Stokman added that the mission would not be responsible for their act of civil disobedience, though there were many good Christians in the Mission. These difficulties had been put before Mr. Dundas previously, but it seemed nothing had been done.

Mr. Hawkesworth had earlier declared the equal tax for all Kom people to be 3/6 per head. No pagan male was allowed to get the tax disc unless he had paid 6/- to the chief. Vassals chiefdoms of the Kom people, like Mbenkas, paid 6/- to 8/- or even 10/- to the chief according to the number of houses besides their heavy tributes in kind to the chief. Christians were left to pay 6/- only. According to Father Stokman, this was one of the reasons that the chief disliked the Christians and their Fathers. Father Stokman pleaded with the Resident to regularise the tax situation. The issue of the catechist called Andreas Tim, who was now behind bars, was also raised. Although the case had been tried and concluded, Father Stokman stated that Andreas had done nothing wrong. Father Stokman complained that some chindas had seriously offended him and he saw in this attack the indirect hand of the Fon of Kom. Father Stokman stated that the chief must have given them orders to do so.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ BNA-Sd Correspondence Father Stokman to the Divisional Officer, 1930

⁴⁰⁸ BNA-Sd Invitation for Lunch from Father Stokman to the Resident, 29th of May 1930.

⁴⁰⁹ BNA-Sd Correspondence from Father Stokman to the Resident, 18th of May 1930.

Esu which was under the pastoral area of jurisdiction of the priest in Njinikom had a similar scenario. In a confidential memorandum from the Divisional Officer, Bamenda Division, L.L. Cattle, to the Honourable Senior Resident of the Cameroon Province in Buea, the Divisional Officer, brought to the attention of the Resident the extent to which the fathers at Njinikom had gone. Cases of interferences in Native courts procedures by priests in the divisions had become almost the norm where a Christian was concerned. The case of Tim of Esu, heard as an appeal case in the Fungom Native Court, was for return of a girl. The man referred to as Tim was the defendant. His (Tim) only claim to the girl was that, as she was his maternal uncle's daughter, she became his property on the death of her father. The plaintiff, supported by the girl's mother and brother, was proved to have paid dowry to the brother, her guardian. The defendant made no attempt to disprove or contradict this, or the statement of the chief of We that inheritance in his clan was direct from father to son, not to the nephew as elsewhere in the Fungom area. From the evidence produced, it was a straightforward case. Every member of the native authority supported the decision of the lower court that the defendant should return the girl to the plaintiff. This decision was upheld. Whereupon the defendant (Tim) stood up, defied the court and said he would not carry out the judgment. He (Tim) made no mention that his refusal was a matter of conscience. The following day the complainant stated that he had paid dowry on the girl to Tim and that a caveat had been entered against his marriage. He was advised to make his dowry arrangements with the rightful guardian. Tim was sentenced to imprisonment and the girl handed over to the plaintiff.

At Njinikom, the Reverend Father Schmidt confronted the Divisional Officer over the case and, having produced a sheet of paper covered with statements made by this man, proceeded to question him from it. The Divisional Officer took strong exception and informed him that he could not allow him to cross-examine him on statements made by a man who had never appeared in the case. Among the allegations made was that Tim had been beaten at the Court. When the Divisional Officer left Fungom, the plaintiff took a judgment summons against Tim. Before the Court, (Tim) again defied them and refused to carry out their order and was sentenced to three months imprisonment. The court enforced their order and the girl was handed over to the plaintiff. The Divisional Officer sent orders to the Native Authority to amend their judgment and to see that the girl, a Christian, was

not forced to live with the animist plaintiff, but should live with her guardian until she married in the church. Ferdinand admitted that the Plaintiff had paid dowry to the girls' guardian. The attached letter was then sent to the Reverend Father at Njinikom.

According to the Divisional Officer, on neither occasion was it suggested that Tim's contempt of court – by defying it and refusing to carry out its order – was a conscientious objection. The Divisional Officer was convinced that Tim's whole attitude was because he was aware that his case would be taken up by the Fathers and thought that he could, therefore, treat the court with contempt. The Divisional Officer, L.L. Cattle, concluded the memorandum by saying:

“In 1928, the Reverend Father Stokman, now in charge at Njinikom, had said, “I tell the Christians, I cannot help them in the Native Courts but that I can do so in the Appeal court...The Fathers at Njinikom are neither of them English and it is extremely difficult to make them understand our methods. On many occasions, they have been informed verbally and in writing that all complaints and orders must go through the proper channels: namely the Native Authority and the Administrative Officer. There is hardly an order of the Native Authority or a Native Court case or complaint in which a Christian is concerned. The converts in their parish are beginning to think more and more that they are politically separate from the animists. The organization, which the Fathers are encouraging and which is steadily growing, is the Christian quarter, separate from the remainder of the village catechist, the Catholic Priest and the Administrative Officer”.⁴¹⁰

The Resident, M. Macgregor, wrote a letter to the Divisional Officer referring to the interview he had had with the Fathers at Njinikom on May 29, 1930. He indicated that Fathers Stokman and Schmidt raised the numerous points that, according to them, were capable of crippling their authority if the case was not settled in their favour. The first concerned a case of assault in the market by palace chindas on a runaway chinda, who had been sent to the market to purchase something for the Fathers. Father

⁴¹⁰ BNA-Sd Confidential Memorandum from the Resident Cameroon Province Buea to the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division, April 9, 1930 paragraph 11.

Stokman was very insistent that his authority would be destroyed if punishment were not inflicted on the guilty. He was not inclined to accept any assurance that the matter was still sub judice, but wished punishment to be inflicted in accordance with his own views as to the incident. The Resident settled in favour of the Fon himself, meting out the punishment on the chindas.⁴¹¹

The missionaries in Njinikom certainly saw Njinikom as a religious state where religious laws were expected to govern every facet of life. For example, the Father expected the Divisional Officer, to help the Catechist Tim. In the course of his argument, the priest protested against a Christian woman being given in marriage to a Basel man and said it was against the law. The Resident assured him that Church and civil law were entirely distinct, that he considered the man was rightly punished and that he did not propose to revise the decision.

The problem of payment for road work and future calls for labour did not escape the attention of the Resident.

“The Father raised the point of payment for roadwork. I assured him that the matter had been dealt with by Mr. Dundas and that you were keeping an eye on what happened. At the same time, I reminded the Father that this was not a matter about which, once it had been brought to your attention, he was further concerned. He then replied that he raised the last point merely least in future difficulties should arise with the Christians in the case of further calls for labour. I assured him that, in such an event, the usual procedure of the courts would be employed for dealing with the situation”.⁴¹²

Surprising, the Fathers then brought up the matter of the complaint made by the Chief of We as to the manner in which he had been treated by Father Schmidt. The Fathers took the greatest exception to the fact that the Divisional Officer had reduced the Chief's complaint against them to writing. They asserted that for the Divisional Officer to listen to and take down a complaint in writing by a native against a Father would undermine what they called their authority and render their work futile. The attitude of the Fathers

⁴¹¹ BNA-Sd Correspondence from the Resident, M. Macgregor, to the Divisional Officer Bamenda, 31st May 1930.

⁴¹² BNA-Sd Correspondence from the Resident, M. Macgregor, to the Divisional Officer Bamenda, 31st May 1930.

on this point was most unreasonable and it was impossible to make them realize that it was the Divisional Officer's duty to deal with complaints so.

The Fathers complained in general that the Divisional Officer supported the Chief against their authority whenever friction occurred. They took the view that it was the Divisional Officer's duty to support them in their work in every possible way because of the great benefits they were conferring on the country by introducing Christianity. They complained that listening to complaints of the chief as to their attitude toward the Native Administration was destroying what they called their authority. Though it was pointed out to them that they had no authority to interfere in administrative matters, they continued to discuss this, adopting what was considered a most unreasonable attitude.

Their interference in court cases and their open encouragement of complaints against the chief and the administration was discussed. Though both Fathers kept repeating that they always told complainants to go to the chief, they kept insisting that they were obliged to listen to such complaints. It was quite impossible to get them to discuss matters in a reasonable spirit; though eventually they gave an assurance that they would abstain from active interference in administrative matters beyond giving advice to parties to take their cases to the chief or the Divisional Officer. The Fathers objected to the chief using his *chindas* to investigate cases against Christians and at one time seemed to suggest that the chief should visit them personally to explain the action he had taken in dealing with matters in which Christians were involved. Such an attitude was considered unreasonable. The administration arranged a system of communication between the Fathers and the chief, which both parties accepted as satisfactory.

General dissatisfaction was expressed at the inability of Christians to obtain justice in court and the minor embarrassments to which they were subjected by way of calls for carriers or labour. It was pointed out to the Fathers that anyone with a grievance could complain to the chief or the Divisional Officer and ask for an investigation. The Fathers ridiculed the idea of reference to the chief and rather expected the Divisional Officer to deal directly with any matters or cases to which the Fathers drew attention. Father Stokman, with reference to his relations vis-à-vis the Government, said that all he was concerned with was to be assured that the Divisional Officer would not be permitted to support the chief against the mission. Whatever he meant by that, he was anxious for an assurance that the Government

appreciated the efforts being made by himself and the other Fathers to promote Christianity and the general uplift of the people.⁴¹³

It seems that, after the 1930 interview, the priests did not fully understand their role. The mission had become a state within a state, making its own laws and applying them to those who were under its authority. Take, for example, the case of Mban, which attracted the attention of the Resident after he was banned from the church. On January 12, 1931, the Divisional Officer addressed a memorandum to the Resident concerning a complaint against a Christian called Mban and assault on a girl named Julia. He stated that Mban had been employed as a carpenter at the Mission until six months before. Another Christian made a complaint to the superior that he was owed 5/- by Mban. The superior called the two men to his office where he held an enquiry and, as a result, he ordered Mban to return the 5/-. Mban refused to do so and said he wished the case to be heard in the Native Court. At the end of that month the superior deducted 5/- from Mban's pay and handed it to the man in question. Mban protested and gave up his work as carpenter. Consequently, the superior told him that he must accept punishment or be excommunicated. Mban accepted the punishment, which was to go to Sasse. On his return, he was instructed to return to Sasse and Njinikom with a load. For this, he received no pay, with the exception of 5d from Father Kelly at Sasse. On his return, he was instructed to return to Sasse for another load. He refused to do so. The superior forbade him to attend the church again. After this time, all the Christians in Njinikom ostracized him. His two wards, Julia and Flora, informed the Divisional Officer that they were afraid to disobey the order of the Superior that no Christian speak to or have any dealings with a person who has been driven out of the church. They said that this order was the direct cause of the trouble with their guardian, Mban. Mban further alleged that his wife, whom he had married in the church, was also ordered to leave him, but she had not done so.

From the statement of Mban, it appeared further that the superior has adjudicated without authority and was liable to prosecution under section 25 of the Native Courts ordinance. Further, he had forced labour by threats, had been responsible for a breach of the peace and had been the direct cause of

⁴¹³ BNA-Sd Correspondence from the Resident, M. Macgregor, to the Divisional Officer Bamenda, 31st May 1930.

the dissension between Mban and his two wards. Mban belonged to the Roman Catholic Church at Njinikom and fell under the spiritual ban of his church. This was a matter on which Government rightly could take no action and should make no comment. The actions of Mban in taking the girl Julia to his compound by force and of the large number of Christians in rescuing Julia from him, were to be considered and judged by themselves, independently of the rights or wrongs of the spiritual ban of the Reverend Father.

The Resident ruled that Mban had a clear right to sue the Reverend Father for the 5/- stopped from his pay. In submitting to the Father's punishment, he exercised his rightful choice. The fact that he did so did not deprive him of his right to sue the Father for the 5/-, but it did prevent him from demanding any compensation for the punishment he voluntarily accepted from the Father. With such wrangling, misconception and misuse of authority, the Resident ruled that, "All these persons must be made to understand it is for them to choose their Religion. If they want the Father Superior's brand of Religion, they must submit to it. If they don't want it, they can claim their legal rights as independent persons, always remembering that their relations and friends may prefer to choose otherwise and are free to do so, unless there is a good legal reason to prevent them. Section 12 of the Labour Ordinance makes it a definite offence for an employer to withhold wages."⁴¹⁴

Esu Christian Village: An Axis of Dissension

Just when the government had begun breathing a sigh of relief because the trouble at Njinikom over the Mban case had been settled, attention was turned on Esu. Despite the government's condemnation of the Christian enclave divorced from the authority of the chief, the Mill Hill missionaries persisted in their caprices. Trouble in Esu, as in Baseng, Njinikom, was linked to a Christian settlement established against the wishes of the chief. As had been the case elsewhere, women were at the centre of the controversy. The location had changed, the actors were different, but the scenario was the same: attempts by the local chief to prevent the establishment of a Christian

⁴¹⁴ BNA-Sd Confidential memorandum from the Resident Cameroon Province Buea to the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division 31st of January, 1931

enclave, insistence of a priest on its necessity and the intervention of the government. The drama that had been acted in Njinikom in the 1920s ending in a shadow on the mission was about to be re-enacted in Esu.

About 3 years ago, some women were beaten by the juju when on their way to the mission when the Reverend Father was there a complaint was made to the chief and he advised that it would be better for the Christians to live outside their father's compound near the mission to prevent similar occurrences.⁴¹⁵ As a result, these Christians banded themselves together in the mission territory on a permanent basis. The whole observable fact of Christians settling out of the normal traditional confines of the village, putting themselves beyond the authority of the chief and looking up to the catechist and priests as their new authority figures was viewed with abhorrence. The Chief decided that it was imperative for all Christians to return to their former houses. The mission was to remain what it had originally been intended for, that is, a church, catechist's house and rest house for European priests.

Father Jacobs had an interview with the Esu Christians at Njinikom and they preferred leaving Esu country to building their houses inside the pagan towns. Further, they reported that the Esu chief persisted in making his farm inside the Mission compound. The Christians in Esu, like in Njinikom, simply refused to disband. They refused to leave the mission, preferring to go to prison than build their houses inside the town. In the extreme case, they expressed their intention to leave the country all together.

Roman Catholic Church and Necessity of Christian Villages

On March 14, 1935, the Father addressed a letter to the Divisional Officer, explaining why he was against scattering the Christians. Firstly, in any place where the Church tried to spread Christianity, it tried to keep the Christians as far as possible from all pagan influence, since pagan surroundings were bound to have a bad influence on the Christians' morality. In places like Esu, Wum and Mukuru, where the houses were built too near each other, it was impossible to keep the Christians away from pagan influence, except by allowing them to live in a separate community outside

⁴¹⁵BNA-Sd Correspondence from Father L. Jacobs to the Divisional Officer Bamenda, March 19, 1935.

the pagan village. The second reason advanced for the creation of the Christian village was freedom of religion. The catechist was expected to give doctrine lessons to catechumens and small children twice daily. It was impossible for catechumens, especially women, to attend doctrine regularly, owing to the opposition of pagan relations, except if they were permitted to stay some place where the freedom to attend doctrine was guaranteed. For small children, it was even more necessary that they stay at the mission until they were admitted to the Sacraments. Thirdly, if Christians were not allowed to stay on the mission premises, the hostility of the pagans against the Christians could become unbearable, especially in places where the houses were spread over a wide area. Of course, recourse to the civil authorities was always open to them, but there were many minor troubles that could not be reported and graver ones, which were hard to prove. It was for this reason that a special site appointed to the Christians away from the pagan town was considered very advisable, if not necessary, at Esu.

With neither the chief nor the Christians coming to a common consensus, an inquiry was ordered into the whole affair. According to the investigation, Bu, Chief of Esu, a Member of the Fungom Native Authority, stated that on November 2, 1935, Father A. Kerkvliet arrived at Esu in the afternoon. The chief went to the mission Rest House to salute him. He told the Father that the Catholic Church members of Esu had refused to allow his wives to farm near the mission. The Father called some Christians and asked them why the chief's wives were stopped from farming. A Christian named Ka said that they had bought the ground. The chief informed the Father that the late chief, his father, had received nothing for the land. The chief returned to his compound. Shortly afterwards, the Father appeared with many Christians following him. The Father appeared himself carrying some native medicine which the chief had had placed at the spot in the farm three months before. This was the usual native custom to ensure fertility of the soil. The chief asked the Father why he had removed the medicine. He said he did not want the chief to use the ground for farming any more. He called the chief a pagan. He abused the chief calling him a swine. The chief was

kind enough to inform the priest that many Fathers had come to Esu before, but there had never been any trouble.⁴¹⁶

On February 17, the chief wrote to Divisional Officer complaining that the Father kept him standing up for two hours. Many of his people were there and heard what the father said. Despite the insults, the chiefs was categorical insisting that he wanted all the Christians who had gone to live near the Mission church to leave there and return to their quarters as Hawkesworth had earlier said. About twenty men had gone to live at the Mission with an unknown number of women and children.

Father Kerkvliet stated that the stream around the mission compound has always been regarded as a boundary. The site had been given to the French Fathers by the former Chief. The Priest had told the Chief he had no right or power to farm within the Mission Boundary if his father had given the land to the Mission. Half an hour afterwards, certain Christians came, very excited and said that the Chief's women had put medicines in the farm. As in all enclaves, the reason for the discord was the same. The chief explained that women were deserting their husbands or relatives and living at the Mission. A Christian convert had falsely reported to the Divisional Officer that he (the chief) had sent people to kill elephants without licence. He and his council were very strongly opposed to a settlement being formed around the church, as the land was given solely for a church. The catechist had begun to regard himself as a quarter head and, when the time for the collection of tax came, the Christian converts living at the site refused to pay to their Quarter Head and objected to his going on to the Mission land to collect tax.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶BNA-Sd Investigation at Esu, Fungom Native Authority Area, into a complaint by the chief of Esu against the Reverend Father A. Kerkvliet of the Roman Catholic Mission, Njinikom, by Mr. R.J. Hook, District Officer, was carried out on March, 14, 1935.

⁴¹⁷ BNA-Sd Investigation at Esu , Fungom Native Authority Area, into a complaint by the chief of Esu against the Reverend Father A. Kerkvliet of the Roman Catholic Mission, Njinikom, by Mr. R.J. Hook, District Officer was carried out on March, 14, 1935.



Shisong Convent in 1936 with a few surrounding houses. The scenario at Esu was similar.

When an on the spot assessment had been carried out, certain facts became glaring. There were some ten buildings - several of which were new. It was clear that a settlement was being formed around the church, a stone's throw from the Government Rest House. The Mission Area was considered unnecessarily large for the purpose given - a church - if the boundaries claimed by the Reverend Father were correct. The farms of royal wives were in one corner and well away from the Church building. It was clear that the Chief's women had farmed the land before, as a growing farm "juju" was seen, obviously not recently planted. The farms of the Mission converts living at the site were quite close to the Church. It was clear that the Reverend Father did not realize that the site was held by the converts as a church site subject to their good behaviour and at the pleasure of the Chief and council. He appeared to imagine that the Mission had a clear title.

The Demise of Esu Christian Village

The conclusion was simple. The Chief agreed to leave the area entirely for the purpose for which it was originally given, that is, for a church, catechist's house and rest house for European priests. There was henceforward to be no farming within the area, although existing crops could be reaped. At the end of six months, all persons residing at the Mission site were to return to their quarters in Esu – where their houses still existed. The Chief and Council guaranteed just and proper treatment to the converts, promising that there would be no interference with their religion. When all seemed to have been settled, the priest voiced a very contrary stand: "The Christians will never agree to move."⁴¹⁸

After the inquiry conducted by the Divisional Officer, in a letter written on March 16, 1935, the priest openly declared:

"I have not altered my intention of laying the Esu matter before the Rev. Superior at Njinikom. I hope to have a personal interview with him on Wednesday next 20/3/35. Since I learned from Christians from other places that you intend to apply the same measures of scattering the Christians also in other places, I fear that the matter has taken on a more general aspect and I think it proper that only the superior of Nkom will deal with it."⁴¹⁹

With few options left for the Fathers at Esu and the memory of the Baseng trials still very much fresh, they were aware that the government had the muscle to deal with the issue the way it wanted. With the government leaning towards the native administration and a settlement, the priests had no option but to tender an apology. In 1935, Father A. Kerkvliet wrote, "I am sorry to tell you that I deeply regret the misconduct of the Christians on your behalf in sending you this offensive scribble. Honestly, I was not in the least

⁴¹⁸ BNA-Sd Investigation at Esu, Fungom Native Authority Area, into the A complaint by the chief of Esu against Reverend Father Kerkvliet of the Roman Catholic Mission, Njinikom, Mission by Mr. R.J. Hook, District Officer, 14th March 1935

⁴¹⁹ Letter from Father Kerkvliet to the the Divisional Officer, in a letter written on March 16, 1935

aware of their intention. They did not inform me, knowing beforehand that they would meet with a strong disapproval. Do not try in the least to excuse their action. They consider your decision of scattering the Christians an injustice done to them. Perhaps it was not wise on my part to oppose your decision in their presence, since this might encourage their opposition, but I was only guided by spiritual principles. If I have been at fault in any way I humbly ask your pardon.”⁴²⁰

The apology had no undertaking to follow the prescribed policy. With the missionaries bent on following the proscribed procedure in their evangelization, V.K. Johnson, the Assistant Divisional Officer, from his years of experience in dealing with these priests concluded that there was no need to continue in a discussion with the priests, who had disregarded the wishes of the administration but civil and administrative. In a letter to the Resident, on March 25, 1935, he complained about the Reverend Fathers of the Catholic mission of Njinikom, insisting that Father Jacobs and Father Kerkvliet be removed.

“I have to request that Monsignor Rogan arrange for the transfer of Fathers Jacob and Kerkvliet from this division at an early date. I am having correspondences with Father Jacobs, who is endeavouring to set up refuge for native women and girls desirous of learning doctrine and who is reluctant to accept my advice and instructions on the matter.”⁴²¹

The memorandum showed how close the administration, both civil and traditional, had come to singing a symphony together with few discordant notes. The Assistant Divisional Officer intimated that the complaints of the chief of Esu against Father Kerkvliet were justified, although it was perhaps unwise of the chief to allow his women to farm within the mission boundaries. The chief had had no difficulties previously with the Roman Catholic Mission Fathers. The attitude of the young priests towards the chief was attributed to their youthful exuberance. Father Kerkvliet was a young

⁴²⁰ BNA-Sd. Letter of apology written by Father A. Kerkvliet, receiver not indicated 14th March 1935

⁴²¹ BNA-Sd Confidential Memorandum from the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, to the Senior Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, March 17, 1935.

Dutch priest, aged 27, who had spent barely two years in Cameroons. He was stationed at Njinikom.

The Resident of the Cameron Province, G.H. Finlay, immediately informed Monsignor Rogan that he had received from the District Officer, Bamenda, R.J. Hook, correspondence on the subject of a dispute at Esu and a complaint against one of his priests, Father Kerkvliet of the Catholic mission of Njinikom. He went on to inform Monsignor Rogan that it concerned the mission compound at Esu in which some Christians apparently were residing against the wishes of the chief. He concluded by inviting Monsignor Rogan to find time to discuss the matter with him on Monday morning at 10 a.m. The tone of the language in the letter from the Resident, after the turbulent years of the early 1930s, showed how the mission and the government had both moved on the issues between the missions and the traditional authorities. The approach adopted by the Resident was simple. He moved quickly to confront the Monsignor head-on about the issue.⁴²²



Father Leo Onderwater, A. Kerkvliet and C. Hoevanaars

⁴²²BNA-Sd Memorandum from the Resident Cameroon Province Buea to the Right Reverend Monsignor Peter Rogan O.B.E., May 9, 1935.

The dispute concerned the Roman Catholic Christians of the town of Esu. The mission complained that the chief was farming within the area of the land given to the mission by the chief's predecessor. The chief complained that the Christians were settling and living in the mission compound and, as a consequence, were putting themselves beyond the control of the Native Authority. The matter of Christian settlement had been the subject of considerable discussion during the past few years. Monsignor Rogan's reply was simply that Father Kerkvliet was a young priest and, as such, should not have corresponded at all with the District Officer. Monsignor Rogan reiterated that this was contrary to his instructions. In this particular case, Father Jacob, the Father Superior, was himself occupied with other matters at the time and had authorized Father Kerkvliet, who was dealing with matter at Esu, to write a letter, but Father Jacob had not realized the extent of the dispute.

Monsignor Rogan also deprecated the letter written in "pidgin English" by Father Kerkvliet on October 20, 1934, to the chief of We. Monsignor Rogan said these settlements of Christians converts in mission compounds were not allowed. He himself was not in favour of Christian settlements at all and would have preferred that the Christians lived in their own towns with their own people, provided there was no interference with the practice of their religion. Unfortunately, it was difficult to prevent interference. Pressure was brought to bear by non-Christian Elders and pagan husbands to compel Christians to attend clubs and plays and frequently women were prevented by the "jujus" on the road from going to the mission for their instruction and observance.

Father Jacob, who had almost seen the Christian enclaves as an inalienable part of his creed, said that he was in favour of Christians living in separate communities because, otherwise, the influence of their surroundings prevented them from developing their religion, improving their conditions and growing up as Christians. Monsignor Rogan and Father Jacob recognized the necessity of support and obedience to the Native Authority and stated that it was the policy of the mission to encourage and insist upon it. Father Jacob said that the Christians had had to move two times already: first, the Christians living in the mission compound were asked to leave in 1927-1928; and second, in 1931-1932, the Christians were told to leave the town and

settle at the mission because there was too much trouble. Now they were being instructed to leave the mission compound again.⁴²³

Father Jacob was of the opinion that the chief had not yet obeyed the District Officer's order in this particular case and "was still making his farm" within the boundaries of the land given to the mission. He added that in the same year the chief had given tax discs to the catechist to enable him to collect the taxes from all the Christians. Father Jacob, instead of allowing the catechist to undertake this exercise, advised him not to.

After discussion, the Resident asked the Divisional Officer to confirm whether the chief had kept his own side of the bargain. As to whether or not they were to be compelled to leave the mission compound and settle in town, no direction was given. He, however, hoped that Father Jacob would advise them to do so if the chief and the elders saw to it that they would not be interfered with. In any case, they were not permitted to make a new settlement without the consent of the chief, but the Resident would not object if the chief decided within his own powers to allow the Christians to live together within the area of their villages and subject themselves to the authority of the local chief. The emphasis on allowing no new settlement was clear. "There must be now no new towns or settlements. It is hoped that, with a good degree of tolerance between the Christians and non-Christians, there would be no need for separation."⁴²⁴

Separation was naturally not good for the community. The case of Esu was not new. The mission had resisted attempts to dismantle the Christian village of Njinikom forcing many of the women to relocate elsewhere. The same difficulties, which were inherent in Esu, had been rife all over Nigeria when the French Fathers fancied the concept of Christian villages; however, with some concessions on both sides, the difficulties were transcended leaving no trace of the initial acrimony. The Resident went one step further,

⁴²³BNA-Sd Notes of the meeting between the Resident, Mr. G.H. Finlay, Monsignor Peter Rogan, OBE and Father L. Jacob held at the Resident's office in Buea on Monday, May 13th, 1935 at the Resident invitation on the subject of the dispute between Father Kerkvliet and the chief of Esu

⁴²⁴ BNA-Sd/A Notes of the meeting between the Resident, Mr. G.H. Finlay, Monsignor Peter Rogan, OBE and Father L. Jacob held at the Resident's office in Buea on Monday, May 13th, 1935 at the Resident invitation on the subject of the dispute between Father Kerkvliet and the chief of Esu

proposing that Monsignor Rogan and Father Jacob should consider giving up their claim to the present land and the chief in return should reciprocate their show of goodwill by offering them another piece of land appropriate to meet the required needs of the mission and nothing more. The mission requirements were a rest house, catechist's house and church. The chief of Esu on his part was to see to it that there was no interference and to offer a sympathetic ear to request of the Christians if they wished to live together within the town.

The Verdict on the Esu Christian Village

On May 23, 1935, the Resident addressed a confidential letter to the District Officer, Bamenda Division, concerning the dispute at Esu, Fungom Native Authority, Bamenda and the Division, establishing guidelines. First, the chief was to stop farming on Mission land. Second, all persons (other than the catechist) were to leave the mission compounds as ordered by the Divisional Officer within six months of the order (no direction as to where they were to live was given). Nevertheless, it was up to the Christians to decide where to settle, but it was incumbent on them to obtain the needed permission from the competent authority according to native customs. Finally, the present settlement might be exchanged for a new and similar site that could contain essential mission buildings.

In a more astute and discerning note, the Resident advised the Divisional Officer to meet the chief and the Christians together in the absence of the Father and persuade them to come to some agreement and live together in harmony. It did not matter where the Christians lived, so long as they were under the authority of the chief, if neither side was incensed to act in a manner liable to rouse animosity on the part of the other side. The Resident considered that it was ill advised to prevent the Christian members of his community from settling within their own land. It would be better, of course, if they were allowed to live in their own homes within the town and it was considered unwise to use any coercive methods in the short run. While appreciating the difficulties of the situation and confident that the matter was about to be concluded satisfactorily on the lines suggested, he concluded that, "he did not propose because of this incident or of such others as have been brought to his notice to request the removal of the Superior, Father

Jacob. Father Kerkvliet was a subordinate. Monsignor was allowed to deal with him.”⁴²⁵

The chief denied that he had refused permission for the erection of the churches: his brother, the late chief had refused permission in 1927, with the result that the Roman Catholic converts concentrated in the two quarters of Njinikom and Fuanantui. However, by 1938, there were four other Roman Catholic mission churches in four other quarters, excluding the churches in three quarters that had been abandoned due to poor attendance.

At the festival of Ibin, he (the Fon of Kom) had not been consciously rude to the two Fathers; they had sat down but walked about a good deal, taking photos. He had gone so far as to pay 10/- for a cup one of the Fathers had taken a fancy to and made a present of it to him. He had had no quarrel with the mission and thought he was on good terms with it.

On September 2, 1937, in a letter to the chief, the Fathers wrote,

“One child of my doctrine was recently taken away without notice being given. This is against the discipline of this mission. If any child wishes to be absent itself from any of our schools, the respective Father in charge must be informed.” The facts according to the chief were simple. The father of this child was Nkoa, a son of the chief. Nkoa’s wife, the mother of the child, had gone to stay with her father, Yongbang, a Christian living at Njinikom. Yongbang sent the child to the school at Njinikom. Later Nkoa’s wife left him and Nkoa sent for the child through the chief as he had severed connections with his former wife’s family. The chief sent a message to Yongbang, the temporary guardian of the child, to bring it back. Bichia, Yongbang’s wife, brought it and, at the chief’s bidding, took it back to its father Nkoa”.⁴²⁶

The removal of the child caused the Fathers to write to the chief and the chief replied that he did not know and had to ask the father. He could not produce a copy of his reply. He maintained that, in such cases, he had only to send his message to the child’s guardian. It was for the guardian to inform

⁴²⁵BNA-Sd/A Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, to the District Officer, Bamenda, May 23, 1935.

⁴²⁶ BNA- correspondence from the Fon of Kom to the Superior of the Njinikom Catholic Mission n.d.

the Fathers of the mission that the child was being taken away. His only legitimate concern was to see that the child was handed over to the proper person.

Insolence of Roman Catholic Officials and Abuse of Authorities

The Mill Hill missionaries, despite the warning of the early 1930s and the undertaking of Monsignor Rogan, continued to tamper with native administration. In some places, they practically assumed the role of the administrators, both civil and traditional. It is true that in some places missionaries acted as legal representatives of their government, but this was never the case in the southern Cameroons. The missionaries sought to bring the chiefs under their control whenever the opportunity presented itself. In 1938, the Senior District Officer of Bamenda informed the Senior Resident of the Cameroon Province in Buea that, while on tour in the Bansa area, a number of chiefs had come to see him on one occasion, remarking that they had come at his behest. He had not sent for them, but, as one of the Fathers wanted to see the chiefs, the message delivered to the chiefs by the Roman Catholic catechist was to the effect that the Divisional Officer wished to see them.

The Senior District Officer said that he had previously heard rumours of this subterfuge but had not paid much attention to them. He considered the instance reported by Mr. Kay a case of excessive zeal on the part of the Roman Catholic catechist. Nevertheless, there was a solid foundation for these rumours. It had come to the attention of the government that the mission used the name of the Divisional Officer to achieve its purposes. Thus, messages were sent to people that the Divisional Officer wanted to see them. The people naturally obeyed, only to find out that it was not the Divisional Officer but the catechist or some Roman Catholic mission official who wanted to see them. Instructions were sent that if certain orders were not obeyed the Divisional Officer was to sanction defaulters.⁴²⁷

In 1933, W.M. Bridges, Assistant Divisional Officer, Bamenda Division, received a complaint from the Medical Officer, Bamenda, Dr. W. Campbell Davidson, protesting against the recent action of Reverend Father Francis

⁴²⁷Correspondence No. B.1511/8 from the District Officer, Bamenda Division, to His Honourable, the Senior Resident of the Cameroon Province, April 13, 1938.

Figl, who was alleged to have visited the Government Native Hospital at Bamenda during the absence of the Medical Officer and to have interfered with the staff and patients. The patients refused to take medicines as prescribed for them on grounds that they were going to receive Holy Communion.⁴²⁸

Missionary Interference with Government Hospitals

The Charge Nurse stated that on April 24, Father Francis Figl entered the hospital and instructed all Catholic patients in the hospital not to receive treatment. He held a meeting in a private ward to the discomfort of a serious pneumonia case. He ordered patients that the Medical Officer had said should not be disturbed and patients suffering from synovitis, who had been instructed not to walk, to attend this meeting. On the Charge Nurse remonstrations and mentioning of the Medical Officer's instructions, he was forced to clear out.⁴²⁹

After a careful inquiry into the matter, the Divisional Officer concluded that the Reverend Father Francis Figl had indeed obtained permission from the Medical Officer, Bamenda, to visit the Government Hospital but had failed to make it clear for what purpose the permission was required. Had he done so, in all probability the complaints voiced by the Nursing staff would have been avoided. Father Francis Figl subsequent actions in the Hospital appear to have been tactless, probably due to inexperience with the hospital routine and conditions in West Africa. It seems clear that he caused some disruption of the hospital routine.

The government, in view of the recent squabbles with the missions over matters that did not directly concern the mission premises itself, was hesitant to grant further concessions to missions in acquiring land or opening schools or hospitals. For example, the government turned down the petition of Sister Mary Loreto to open a hospital in Soppo. Hospitals at Buea and Victoria were considered accessible enough to the inhabitants of Soppo and the German Baptist Mission at Great Soppo was already constructing another.

⁴²⁸ BNA-Sd Memorandum from the Medical Officer, Bamenda to the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, May 3, 1933.

⁴²⁹ BNA-Sd confidential Memorandum from the Divisional Officer, W.M. Bridges, ADO, to the Reverend Father Superior, Roman Catholic Mission, Kumbo.

(The Bakweri Native Administration had voted 120 pounds, the estimated cost to complete it). The government, therefore, considered another hospital in the vicinity unnecessary.⁴³⁰

On November 24, 1937, Mr. Harcourt met Father Bruens, who was temporarily in charge of the missions during the absence of Father Altman, at Njinikom. Father Bruens complained that he found the chief of Kom very difficult to deal with and at times discourteous. On one occasion, a child was taken away from the mission. When Father Altman demanded to have the child returned, the chief remarked contemptuously, "who is Father?" The second case happened at Laikom during the big Kom festival that takes place after Christmas. Father Altman and another Father had gone to Laikom to see the celebration. They saluted the chief, who left them standing and did not offer them chairs the whole day. Thirdly, Altman complained of the chief's constant refusal for permission to open new churches in other areas of his Fondom. According to the Fathers, the Fon was apprehensive of any establishment of new churches, principally because the women might be attracted and would perhaps leave their husbands. Father Bruens was of the opinion that Kom needed a clean-up such as Bansa had had recently. He could not suggest any of the villains of the piece apart from the chief himself.

In the mind of Father Bruens, the superior culture that he and the mission represented had to dominate the lower culture of the African. He believed that the proper study of the modern anthropologist was the merging of the two, or the superimposition of the superior on the lower. The old fashioned student could interest himself in the origins of divine kingship or the collection of stone implements. The pagan objection that the erection of the Roman Catholic Mission would involve the loss of their women was not valid. If the women chose to adopt the higher culture, so much the worse for the lower.

Dissent in the Christian Village

The assertion that in time of crisis the African seeks refuge in his time-honoured traditions came true in Kom in the late 1950s. These traditions of redress were not Christian at all. However, in time of crisis the Christian

⁴³⁰ BNA-Sd Correspondence from Resident to the Medical Officer, Cameroon Province, Victoria, September 2, 1939.

women at Njinikom without qualms resorted to what would have been considered repugnant. Over the years, the Mill Hill missionaries had introduced the liberal ideas of individual freedom, Christian morality and social justice through doctrine classes, the convents, Health Clinics and, more formally, through their educational institutions. However, the obtrusive manner in which the missionaries inculcated the theory and practice of human rights and justice, for which they were detested by the traditional and colonial authorities, was apparent when they publicly defended their Christians and catechists in open courts and ridiculed and belittled the chiefs and the native laws.⁴³¹ The Mill Hill missionaries themselves were soon to have the taste of their own medicine when, in 1958, the Catholic women staged demonstrations all over the region.

This movement was massively led by Catholic Christian women. The cult became so ferocious in its activities that for close to three years not only Churches were boycotted, but also schools, markets and government establishments to the extent that life and all development in the area were completely paralyzed.⁴³² By 1961, all the Christians who had swelled the ranks of this movement, even those in the forefront, returned to the Church and to the sacraments. With hindsight, one can easily see how, in times of social crisis, African Christians might return to their roots by unearthing solutions to redress an injustice, regardless of its variance with Christianity.

⁴³¹Ndi Anthony Mbunwe (2005) op. cit.

⁴³²This movement was referred to as the Anlu. The origin of Anlu is narrated by Kom's oral tradition. The Kom people used to pay annual tribute to the chiefdom of Menjang (a neighbouring tribe) in the form of building a house. The Fon of Kom got tired of the tribute levy and advised his people to resent paying it. The Menjang people interpreted the resentment of the Kom people to pay them tribute as an act of rebellion and decided to punish them accordingly. They secretly planned a punitive expedition against the Kom people when the men would have gone out on a hunting expedition. The plan leaked to the queen mother through her network of spies. The queen mother mobilized the women, disguising them as men by putting on their husbands' attires. Anlu came to be recognized as a reputable organization for handling women and state affairs. It is, in essence, a traditional disciplinary organization, with a military and a mythical origin for the defence of the rights of women and the state.

As it has already been noted while for the European missionary, Christianity represented a system of moral discipline, renunciation of self and sobriety, for the indigenous Christians, Christianity was a liberating force. The difference in perception necessarily led to friction between the two groups of religious leaders. Largely in the Christian settlements of Njinikom, Esu and We which were under the pastoral jurisdiction of Njinikom parish following its creation in 1927, dissent and discord between the Christians and the priests and catechists on one hand and the traditional authorities on the other was a common feature. A discernible symmetrical pattern of events, as if almost by design, characterised these experimental pet projects of the early Mill Hill Missionaries. Njinikom and later Esu and We all came in being against the wishes of the traditional and colonial authorities, favoured by missionaries as conversion strategy, worn out by incessant pressure from colonial, traditional and later ecclesiastical demands for their extinction, finally saw their obliteration. Although these concentrations of Christians in mission compounds were dispersed, Catholicism survived the turbulent attacks in these very localities where mass concentrations of Christians were strongly detested. Their annihilation had become imperative for the eyes of colonial and traditional authorities they had become obstacles on the way of indirect rule which depended on traditional authorities. The collection of Tax and participation in community labour which were seen as essential elements necessary in the functioning of the systems were strongly detested by members of these Christian villages.

Chapter Four

The Baseng Christian Village

Introduction

The Bakossi people occupy an area of more than 3,000 square kilometres on the slopes of the Bakossi Mountains, Mount. Kupe, Mount Mwanenguba and Mount Nlonako, in the Republic of Cameroon. Traditionally farmers, hunters and anglers and with a population of 100,000⁴³³, the Bakossi people grow coffee and cocoa as their main cash crops. Administratively, the people fall under the Kupe-Manenguba Division with headquarters in Bangem and the Mungo Division in the Littoral Province.

The climate of the Bakossi region is equatorial, with heavy rainfall fairly well distributed throughout the year giving rise to forest vegetation and fertile soils. The dry season runs from the month of November to March. During this period, the weather is bright with little or no rainfall and characterised by cold nights and hot days with a wide diurnal temperature range.⁴³⁴ The Bakossi Mountains cover an area of about 230,000 square kilometres and contain what is possibly the largest area of cloud or submontane forest in West and Central Africa. It is undoubtedly one of Africa's most famous bird sites, such as the Mount Kupe Bush-shrike, *Malaconotus kupeensis* alongside the animals in the wild.

The general name "Bakossi" has come to refer to the people on the immediate western and eastern slopes of Mount Mwanenguba and Mount Kupe, who share Ngoe as a common ancestor. According to oral tradition, Ngoe "appeared on Mwanenguba Mountain." He and his wife settled on the western slopes at Mwekan and had many children, the number and birth order differs according to the oral traditions of the various clans. From these slopes, their offspring migrated to different areas. However, two sons,

⁴³³ Assessment Reports on the Elung, Bakossi and Ninong Tribal Area, Kumba Division, by M.O.R. Arthur, 1931

⁴³⁴ www.bacda-nrw.com/bakossipeople.htm may 18th 2012

Anngoe (Nninong) and Ngemengoe (Bangem), remained with their father in the north, forming the nucleus of the present day Bakossi people.

Bakossi land was situated in the Anglo-French frontier, which is a watershed, the highest point being the mountains Mwanenguba and Kupe, both about 6 900 feet high. Between these two points, the lowest altitude is about 3 000 feet and is south of Kupe. The land falls away to the Mungo River only a few hundred feet above the sea level. The villages in this north western part lie in the cluster of two valleys between these mountains and communication between the two clusters is very difficult by land.

Early European Incursions

Events before the German era, largely unrecorded, faded away from living memory of the people. By the time the art of writing was available to the people, some of the legends and traditions had faded beyond recall. However, there still exist some traditions meshed with legends and historical fact pointing to their humble beginnings. According to these legends and traditions, the birthplace of Bakossi, Elung and Ninong and the Bassossi people was Nlun, which at the time of the British was called Ninong village. In this village, lived Ngoe, from whom sprang these four tribes mentioned above.⁴³⁵

The Bassossi are supposed to have lived in the Muangem and Muetenaku valley and to have been driven thenceforward by the expansion of the Bakossi emigration. When a Bakossi village wanted a new site for part of its inhabitants, which happened quite often in those days, a suitable place was found and occupied without seeking permission from anyone. There was plenty of land for all and groups frequently freely resorted to this practice without trouble. This is significant when speculating upon the original site of the Bakossi clans.

Events of the pre-colonial years, which have survived in the people's mind, speak of the exit of the Bassossi westward down from the Muangam Muctuanaku valley, during the Bafo and lum wars of the Bakossi and Elung versus the Ninong wars. The Bakossi-Bafo war is said to have been started by the Mbknut clan of the Bakossi in the classical tradition over a woman. According to the Bakossi, they were completely victorious and drove the

⁴³⁵ *ibid*

Bafo across to the west of the bank of Mungo. The Bakossi claimed victory after they drove the inhabitants of Lum in the French territory from the southern slopes of Mount Kupe and reached the present site of Lum just before the Germans colonised the country. Like many ethnic groups, their attempt to subdue their neighbours only ended with the German invasion and conquest of their land.

Wars between Elung and Ninong seem to have been frequent, but had little definite results except a violent mutual antipathy that lasted for years. It may be said in parenthesis that these wars were no more than the harrying of the nearest enemy village, which sometimes ended in one side or the other becoming tired of the ceaseless ambush and murder and, naturally, moving to safety.

German Subjugation of Bakossiland

The Germans entered Bakossiland in the southeast. The Bakossi offered no resistance during their first encounter with the Germans. Their first reaction against the Germans was to muster their forces near Ebonemin and resist, but they had second thoughts. Loxy, the German leading the campaign, went on to Mueba. On his return, there seems to have been some shooting near Ngombeng and some Ninongs were killed. The Elung optimistically made a law, which amounted to barring all Germans from entering their territory. Their attempt to resist and repel the Germans invaders ended in a fiasco. Owing to German military superiority, many of their fighters were killed. They attributed their failure to defeat the Germans to the kind offices of the Ninong, who had informed the Germans of their existence. After their subjugation, the German administration sent a Basel mission teacher to live in Nkuko and teach the Elung the elementary ideas of western civilisation.

Plantation labour under the German rule seems to have been not unpopular among the Bakossi. The young men who had been exposed to the Germans naturally appreciated European luxuries in food and clothing, which aroused a certain sense of superiority over their more “bush” compatriots. However, they could not survive the rigours of plantation agricultures and many died in the plantations.

After the First World War, German Cameroon was given by the League of Nations as a mandated territory to the French and British governments following the Anglo-French treaty, which were ratified by the Paris Peace Treaties. The arbitrary division of the territory, with no regard to tribal boundaries, had far-reaching negative repercussions on the Bakossi people. The dividing line passed through Bakossi land and incessant changes brought confusion, division and inter-clan and intertribal difficulties. Certainly, descendants from the same ancestors found themselves on different sides of the divide, under different systems of administration. Before the immediate pre-independence years, political trouble in the French Sector had a negative impact on this borderline people. Independence followed for the French sector in 1960 and reunification between the French and English Sector in 1961 provoked intense bitterness between opponents and supporters of the reunification within Bakossi. No tribal entity felt the direct fallout from partition and reunification of Cameroon more than the people of the border. They were the first to absorb the shocks of partition and the distress of reunification, especially with the forceful introduction of paramilitary forces to maintain civil peace and, later, military forces to disband the rebellious elements of the Union des Populations du Cameroun.⁴³⁶

As early as 1936, the setting up of a combined appeal court set the stage for the unity of at least some of the sons of Ngoe under a single administration. In 1953, all of Bakossi came together under one indigenous authority known as Kumba Eastern Area Federation. In 1963, the Bangem District was created incorporating all of Bakossi, but in 1968, this was split into Bangem (Northern Bakossi) and Tombel (Southern Bakossi). In 1977, the common Bakossi Council for these two areas was split into Bangem (Northern Bakossi) and Tombel (Southern Bakossi)

⁴³⁶ This political party associated with communism in French Cameroon favoured unification before independence. The point was that the French were known for their intrigue and could not be trusted to pull out in a dignified manner. It therefore proposed to the United Nations to appoint a Higher Commissioner for Cameroon to take over the two administering authorities. When the UPC was banned in 1955 in the French Cameroons, the leader took refuge in the southern Cameroons. Many other people from across the Mungo, fleeing from French torture and harassment took refuge in the British administered territory. See Albert Mukong (1989) *Prisoner without a crime*, Nubia Press. PP.4-14

The Christian Village Settlement of Baseng

In June of 1926, a mission was opened in Bakossi at Baseng. Unhappily, less than six years later, Monsignor Rogan wrote to the Resident saying that, neither Father Ham nor father Moran (his assistant) was returning to West Africa. One thing that can be said, for the early days of the Catholic mission in British Cameroons, is that there was often high drama and need for a sense of humour. Priests, catechists and Christians sometimes exercised excessive zeal in their efforts to establish the Church. Anthony Mbunwe Ndi uses the term “zealot” more than once in his study and it often fits very well, especially during the episode in Bakossi country.⁴³⁷ Michael Moran arrived from Kumbo on April 24, 1927, to assist Father Ham. Peter Ham was a pioneer missionary and is still held in high esteem by the Bakossi people for his achievements. However, according to government reports, “during his tenure at Baseng, he and his colleagues continuously interfered with chiefs, the native authority and the native courts, which were the cornerstones of British colonial administration. In this controversy, the policy of indirect rule was constantly at odds with the Catholic missionaries stand on issues such as polygamy and ‘the clericals’ concept of their authority”.⁴³⁸

At the centre was the issue of women, the sanctity of the chiefs’ wives and infant betrothal. However, it was the intemperate behaviour of Fathers Ham, Moran and later, Van Dal, that made the situation volatile. Fortunately, the consequences, the expulsion of Fathers Ham and Moran, have clouded their contributions, especially those of Father Ham, to Catholic Bakossi. Yet he is considered their spiritual father.

The pattern of turbulent relations between the Catholic Mission on the one hand and the traditional and colonial administrators on the other, which started in the grassland missions of Kom and Nso, seemed to have transferred to similar areas in the Topical Forest Zone in the Mamfe and Kumba Divisions like an escalating contagion. It seemed that the MILL HILL missionaries, after all the years of initial practical tutorial in the Grass Fields, had failed to imbibe the essentials of missionary technique or adopted a *modus vivendi* akin to the spirit and conditions of the time. Interestingly,

⁴³⁷Robert O’Neil (1991) *Mission to the British Cameroons*, Mission Book Service, St. Joseph’s college, London, p.44

⁴³⁸*Ibid*

the same actor who had seen the smouldering flame ignited by the departing French Sacred Heart Missionaries was at the centre of another controversy of a greater magnitude, which had far-reaching corollary. Father Moran, who had made passionate efforts to solve the problems in Bamenda Division, was unable to transfer the same logic of conflict resolution down south to the forest zone. In the 1920s, Njinikom and Shisong Christian communes became the hub of strife and dissension between the Christian converts and traditional authorities. In the Grass Fields, the catechists and the zealots were those who had been in the tribunal and not the missionaries per se. The missionary came to the rescue of the convert. However, the scenario in Baseng was unprecedented, unparalleled by any events in the territory, it was the missionary with no one to turn to and no one to come to his rescue. He who had wielded so much power over the natives in the Christian settlement and unleashed terror suddenly became helpless in the courts of the government.

The Gathering of the Storm

Up to 1926, owing to the shortage of priests, no missionaries had visited the whole of the Forest Region, which was the source of the religious unrest during the interregnum and the German Catholic Mission Stations at Ikassa and Ossing had not been reopened. It was, therefore, cause for great relief, even to the Administrative Authorities, that Monsignor Peter Rogan chose this difficult area for his maiden tour. Edward John Arnett, the Resident, promised to help him open Mission Stations wherever he pleased. Since it was his pioneer trek, Rogan could not meet up with the numerous appeals made to him for resident priests. However, on his return, he immediately dispatched Father Peter Ham to explore Bakossiland, where teeming populations had earlier asked Monsignor Campling, Rogan's predecessor, for priests.



Monsignor Rogan immersed in a sea of heads during one of his pastoral visits.

Consequently, following closely on his report, which certainly smacked of optimism and future promise, he was posted to open a Baseng Mission in Bakossiland. Shortly afterwards, Father Moran and Father Peter Doeswijk were transferred from Kumbo to join him. This comparatively powerful team of three young, energetic and zealous MILL HILL missionaries certainly seemed like the team needed to unlock the hinterlands and bring the natives under the yoke of Christ. However, this air of apparent fanfare, optimism and promise rapidly gave way as they soon scuffled with the traditional rulers, the people of the area and the Administrative Officers because of their truculent approach to evangelisation. The youthful exuberance of this inexperienced band of missionaries gradually exhibited itself in appalling and menacing conduct, leading to the conviction of missionaries in the dock and their final expulsion from the Cameroons. Father Ham certainly had exhumed methods of evangelisation that were suited for another era and region, but certainly not in African in the 19th century in a territory where the rule had no regard for race, colour, religion, or rank.

Unlike the Christian villages of Njinikom, Shisong and Esu, where early converts bonded together on a more permanent basis, not at the instigation of priests to avoid persecution or to shield themselves from the fury of the traditional authorities, the Christian settlement of Baseng had none of such attributes. It was a brainchild of the missionaries, who desired to have a prolonged period of instructions on Christian doctrine under their watchful eyes. It had some semblance with the transient ill fitted scheme conceived and implemented across the frontiers in French territory, mainly in the south, called Sixas. What is certain is that such a pet project soon brought confrontations between the Christians and the villages, the priest and the chief, the catechist and the Christians. It was a scheme bedevilled by so many internal weaknesses that it was bound to suffer a stillbirth. The devices conceived by the priest brought the whole system into disrepute, casting doubts on the very reason for Christian missionary endeavours. The same Christians who had been brought together by the priests to imbibe meticulously the rubrics of Roman Catholicism began to vent their spleen at what they considered outrageous and an inadmissible behaviour on the part of missionaries and their collaborators, the catechists.

All apparently was well in this closely knit community until 1930 when complaints from the Christian village reached alarming proportions, the Divisional Officer was instructed to go into the question of settlement of women established on native land near the Mission at Baseng. After the initial inquiry, the Divisional Officer concluded that the matter was between the chief and the settlers; but it was necessary to speak of the matter to Father Ham, the Priest-in-Charge.⁴³⁹ The women who had settled at Baseng were very much at the Father's direction, without reference to the Chief. They stayed in the settlement, sometimes for a few weeks, sometimes for a year or more. They were usually those who wished to learn doctrine but belonged to a village with no teacher, those who wished to become Christians, those who wished to marry a Christian husband but were living with a Christian without being married and Christian women living with, but not married to a Pagan.

⁴³⁹BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Memorandum from the Divisional Officer Kumba to the Resident Cameroon Province, Buea, October 16, 1930.



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The purpose of the settlement was that the women should live under the eye of the Mission until their position from the point of view of the Mission had been regularized. This was in the interest of the Mission but not that of the Native Authority. Moreover, it was undesirable that there should be a community separate from the village authority where the priest and the catechist usurped the authority that naturally belonged to the chief. The Priest-in-Charge was anxious that the women should not be moved to the village a mile or two away. He was aware that irregularities occurred even when the women were living near the Mission, but the purpose of the Mission would be altogether stultified if the women were to live at a distance.

⁴⁴⁰ *ibid*

The Divisional Officer thought it would be sufficient if: every woman who wished to join the settlement personally asked the permission of the Chief, just as any other native would who wished to settle on Baseng land; the women would assist on communal labour in the way that the rest of the inhabitants of the village did if called upon; and application would be made to the chief when it was desired to farm fresh land. The Divisional Officer was well aware that the Priest-in Charge was prepared to cooperate in this and, therefore, did not see why the village should not remain where it was since there was nothing more to be gained by transferring the settlement to another village or closing it down all together.⁴⁴¹

Complaints against the Roman Catholic Mission Baseng

Father Peter Ham opened the Catholic Mission Station at Baseng in 1926. From its very inception, the whole enterprise was precarious. On July 19, 1930, Bryan Sharwood-Smith, the Assistant Divisional Officer of Kumba, informed Ham, Rector of the Baseng Mission, that he had received numerous complaints from the Mission adherents of excessive floggings by the Fathers. It was apparent that some of the complainants would seek redress in court and he was naturally concerned with the scandal such an exposure would cause. Smith was seeking Ham's assurance that such barbarous acts would not recur. Father Christian Van Dal, a young Dutchman, barely 26, was singled out as having committed violent acts that threw Baseng Village into a state approaching panic. For this reason, the Divisional Officer also advised the transfer from Baseng of Catechist Pius Epie, against whom the Christians had expressed a general and longstanding dissatisfaction. This was in the best interest of the Mission and the peace and stability of the village.

On June 25, District Officer Sharwood-Smith was on tour at Bakonje and met a delegation of fifty-eight Catholics complaining about the behaviour of the Fathers and catechists. The level of experience and maturity of the missionaries can be measured against the career of one of the young government officers, Bryan Sharwood-Smith, who heard the complaint at Bakonje and visited the priests at Baseng in September 1930. He was born in

⁴⁴¹BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Memorandum from the Divisional Officer Kumba to the Resident Cameroon Province, Buea 16th October 1930

Hull, England in 1899, the son of a classics teacher at a public school. Inspired by the books of Kipling, he dreamed of a post on the North West Frontier in India. He won a classics scholarship to Cambridge, joined the Flying Corps during the war and served in France and India. Afterwards he chose a career in the colonial service and was posted to Cameroons, arriving in January 1921. He worked in Mamfe and had a special interest in the Menka-Widekum area. He studied Hausa at Kano in 1924 and in 1925 was made Assistant Divisional Officer in Bamenda. In 1926, he married and returned to Cameroons. He went on to serve as Governor of the Northern region of Nigeria.

In a lengthy and detailed confidential memorandum addressed to the Resident, Smith elaborated on the various complaints raised against the Catholic Mission. Several excessive and repeated flogging sessions had been organised by Father Van Dal and Father Moran, assisted by Catechist Epie. Van Dal reportedly administered floggings on Lawrence Nkumo of Meket and Benedict Ndue and Athanasius Kome of Baseng over accusations involving adultery.

They had earlier petitioned to Rogan in December 1929, but the petition was never even acknowledged. The deputation complained to the Divisional Officer about Church administration, “punishment work” and floggings. According to the Divisional Officer of Kumba Division J.S. Smith:

“On June 25th I received a deputation of 58 Roman Catholics from Baseng, Meket and Bekume. They had a number of complaints to lay before me and I think it right to observe that from the beginning I was very much struck by the moderation and soberness with which they spoke; by the evident carefulness to speak the truth; and by their loyalty both to their Faith and to the mission priests. More than once when I was questioning them in order that they should amplify their complaints, they said that they could not answer because they had no first-hand knowledge of the point which I raised; and it seemed to me that they had come to me to complain only after trying and failing to get matters remedied by the priests themselves.”⁴⁴²

⁴⁴² BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Memorandum from the Divisional Officer Kumba Division to the Resident, Cameroon Province July 7th 1930. Complaints D, E and F by deputation of Roman Catholics no. 34. p. 10

Some of the complaints related to matters of Church administration and practice. It seems that when a Christian committed or was alleged by Pius Epie, the Catechist, to have committed sexual sin, he was commonly punished by flogging together with what the deputation call “punishment work”. The Divisional Officer was told that this flogging and punishment work were inflicted for nothing but sexual offences.



Father Peter ham and Christian Van Dal, Baseng, December 18th 1929

The work consisted of doing whatever manual labour might be required at the mission: cutting grass, carrying loads, making bricks and the rest; and for this work, he received no pay at all. Three months of this work seemed to be a common sentence. The deputation complained that not only was the work burdensome, but also the spectacle of penitents going up to the mission daily brought their religion into contempt among pagans. Five of the deputation said that Father Ham had flogged them.

Fabian Epie of Meket was a victim. About four months earlier, Pius Epie falsely reported to Father Ham that Fabian had a woman. He was not questioned or given a chance to speak before being flogged. Father Ham flogged him in public. He received “many” lashes with a bush rope and blood flowed as a result. In addition, he was given punishment work for a period of two weeks. The second victim was John Sone of Baseng. Father Ham had flogged him four months earlier and he was given no chance to speak. Father Ham did not explain the flogging. The flogging, done in public at Baseng, had been severe but had not drawn blood. Consequently, he eventually escaped into the Bush.

The Divisional Officer promised on his return to see Monsignor Rogan with regard to the general position. He also promised to forward the memorandum to the Secretary, Southern Province, since it corroborated somewhat similar complaints in Mamfe and Bamenda. The deputation did not wish to summon the Fathers. They wanted a stop to be put to the punishment work and the flogging. The complainants indicated unanimously that their problems were chiefly about Sango Pius Epie, whom they asked be dismissed instantly.

“He was alleged to be completely crooked. Because he had the full confidence of the Reverend Fathers, who used him as an informant, others could not controvert what he said. His word was final and all complaints to the priests had to be channelled through him. In particular, the complainants said he was an extortioner. For example, he charged an extra five shillings under pain of delaying the sacrament of Baptism or Marriage and people had to pay as he was solely in charge of deciding who received these sacraments. He took such care that the Reverend Fathers could not discover this illegal practice.”⁴⁴³

⁴⁴³Ndi Op. cit.



Pius Epie and his wife, Cecilia Akone, with Father B. Stukart, Baseng, 1964

The deputation declared that they would cease to attend the Baseng Church if he was not removed, but would go to Soppo Church, some eighty miles away. The Divisional Officer was convinced they were determined to carry out this threat. The delegations clearly had serious grievances against Sango Epie, who was their own kith and kin and were using the complaints against the priests as an excuse to have him moved out of Baseng. However, this ruse perfectly suited and reinforced the ferocity of the Administrative Officers against the Reverend Fathers as well and so they used the combined attacks to good effect.

Reviewing the numerous complaints he had received, the Divisional Officer decided that the situation was altogether intolerable and submitted to the Resident that whatever action was taken to resolve it should be severe and certain enough to ensure that these things shall never be repeated. While commenting generally on the conduct of the Catholic missionaries in the territory he did not lose sight of those who merited special attention for very good reasons. J. S Smith said:

“I have long known and I believe that every Administrative Officer in this Province has known that it is the practice of the priests of this mission to flog their Christians for offences connected with women; but so far as I am aware, this is the first occasion in which formal complaints about it have been laid. Now that they have been laid, the occasion has come for taking notice of these offences. I have before now gravely warned Father Doeswijk that if ever a complaint of flogging was brought to me and proved, the consequences would be serious. ...It has been shown beyond doubt that these priests have conducted themselves as if the ordinances of man do not apply to them and have rendered themselves liable to be charged with several felonies, besides misdemeanours and simple offences.”⁴⁴⁴

The Rev. Father Moran had spent eight and a half year in the country without going home on leave. This fact according to Smith could explain but it did not excuse his conduct. To speak plainly he appeared to have administered three floggings which were a little short of savage.

The Rev. Father Van Dal owing to his age and inexperience had been in the country for a few months. In this short space of time, he had acquired the tone of violence which undoubtedly characterised at any rate the outstations of the mission. He is said to have descended on a village, inflicted a severe flogging, conducted a kind of manhunt, broken and robbed a house and an impossible threat which set the village in turmoil. The Rev. Father Ham, the superior of the mission had been in the country for five and a half years consecutively. He had administered flogging repeatedly. The deputation complained in general of the floggings.

He was said to be a real scourge on the country and a threat to peace. Regarding the complainants, the Divisional Officer thought it was fortunate that owing to the profoundness of their spiritual strength and loyalty to the Catholic Church, none of them wished to take court action against the priests. However, the entire deputation was determined to have the Catechist punished, transferred and discredited. However, the charges against the Catechist could not be treated in isolation as he committed the alleged instances of assault in league with the Reverend Fathers. This was Smith's assessment of the situation.

⁴⁴⁴ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Memorandum from the Divisional Officer Kumba Division to the Resident, Cameroon Province July 7th 1930. Complaints D,E and F by deputation of Roman Catholics no. 62 P. 19

According to Anthony Ndi, despite the gravity of the situation, there is a rather emphatic element of exaggeration in the report, for example, in some of the charges brought against the priests, such as “breaking into and robbing a house.” In addition, if none of the complainants desired on their own to take the priests to court, why were they being cajoled to do so? Were the administrators using the delegation to settle old personal scores with the missionaries? Certainly, these were logical questions begging for answers. As for Catechist Sango Pius Epie, in whom Father Ham had the liveliest confidence, considering him “the second John the Baptist of Bakossi land,” it must be remembered that his refusal to take up the chieftaincy title of his village infuriated his people and roused enormous hatred for him, almost costing him his life. The charges against him cannot be dissociated from this fact.⁴⁴⁵

The deputation that had officially brought the complaints against the priests in Baseng was primarily concerned with corporal punishment. It was a point the Divisional Officer could not ignore. When confronted by the Divisional Officer, Father Ham stated that in the past there had been occasional incidents of mild corporal punishment. He was absent from the Mission at the time that Father Moran inflicted the floggings. He expressed utter shocked at their severity, stating that he had never approved of such floggings. Father Moran was away when father Ham returned to Baseng, but Father Ham had written to Father Moran expressing dissatisfaction at his actions.⁴⁴⁶

Father Ham had given his word to the Divisional Officer that the practice would not repeat itself. If, from the point of view of the Mission, it appeared to be expedient that a man should have a whipping as a penance, such a penance should be voluntary. The alternative to such penances would be expulsion, temporary or permanent, from the Church. The Divisional Officer found this arrangement “perfectly reasonable and perfectly legal.”⁴⁴⁷

Earlier in April in a memorandum from the Divisional Officer, Kumba Division to the Honourable Senior Resident of the Cameroon Province, the Divisional Officer besides commented on the Kumba Provincial Court cases

⁴⁴⁵ Anthony Ndi (2005) op. cit.

⁴⁴⁶BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

⁴⁴⁷Ibid.

against Father Van Dal and others of the Catholic Mission. He Father Van Dal had been warned by his predecessor concerning his (Van Dal) past conduct and his future relations with the native were to be guided by the greatest discretion. The evidence produced in the case was self-explanatory and to which a plea of guilty was made. The cases showed a most extraordinary outlook as well as a demoralising effect of such outlook on the native adherents of the father's religious persuasion. This outlook was not confined to the Division concerned nor was it making its first appearance. The methods employed by the Fathers were simple. The methods adopted for ascertaining if converts had lapsed from the moral code was by seeking them out in their houses after dark with a search party usually led to the house by the Catechist or Teacher. The Divisional Officer concluded his memo by saying "The prosecution has created a great stir in the Division and it is hoped will serve to check such high handed actions in future by Reverend Fathers and their followers"⁴⁴⁸

Mission Policy in the Cameroon Province

The question of the conduct of Roman Catholic Missions in the Cameroon Province took central stage in the 1930. After the calm enjoyed in the Cameroon Province during the mid and late 1920s, the 1930s saw the mounting of tension between the Roman Catholic Missions and the colonial authorities. At the instructions of the Acting Lieutenant Governor, this matter was to be given careful attention.

The question had engaged the serious consideration of the Resident and Administrative Officers of the Cameroon Province for a number of years and they made every effort to reach an amicable solution to the differences between the policy of the Mission and that of Government. It will be seen, however, that, in spite of everything that has been done, matters had now reached a stage where, "in His Honour's opinion, definite action on the part of Government [was] necessary. The policy of Native Administration has been pursued in the Cameroons Province with success and any religious

⁴⁴⁸ BNA-SD/A memorandum from the Divisional Officer Kumba Division to the Honourable Senior Resident of the Cameroons Province. April 29th 1931.

body which [set] out to destroy the Native Authorities which have been built with such patience during the past years [could not] be tolerated.”⁴⁴⁹

His Honour had discussed this question with Captain Buchanan Smith before the latter proceeded on leave, although at that time the Resident's letter under reference had not been received. It was agreed that the policy of the Mission, which aims at the establishment of large enclaves entirely divorced from the authority of the Native Authorities, created an undesirable position, which according to the Resident was calculated to affect the peace of the country and impair the authority of the policy of Native Administration.

Monsignor Peter Rogan O.B.E. was the head of the mission and was directly responsible for his priests when they were in the Mandated Territory. He was not responsible to any mission in Nigeria and it was understood that he was ultimately responsible to Rome. That was in Ecclesiastical matters. In political matters in the mandated territory, Monsignor Rogan was, therefore, under the Governor General in Nigeria, who had jurisdiction over Cameroon. The government considered Rogan as a kind of fickle and feeble-minded character and contemplated strong decisive action against the missions if Rogan did not take strong action against the wayward priests who had become a menace in the territory: “ From the situation as it is not revealed it would appear that Monsignor Rogan does not exercise control over the actions of his priests and that either an entirely different attitude must be adopted or as a final alternative Government must seek to be rid of a continual cause for disturbance and the undermining of the Native Authorities.”⁴⁵⁰

The government cast doubts over Monsignor Rogan's ability to administer the area under his jurisdiction. In a confidential memorandum, while deploring the horrendous practice of using almost paramilitary storm troopers employed by Father Ham and his immediate assistants in Baseng, the government portrayed Monsignor Rogan as unfit for his post.

“The apparent use of the natives of Yaoundé as a form of mission police is a matter of concern and savours of the forcible imposition of their religion

⁴⁴⁹BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Secretary southern Provinces F.Lynch, to the Honourable Secretary to the Government, Lagos June 12th 1931.

⁴⁵⁰ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Secretary southern Provinces F.Lynch, to the Honourable Secretary to the Government, Lagos June 12th 1931

on the people by the priests of this mission. It is scarcely credible that Monsignor Rogan, especially after a serious warning had been issued to him, is entirely ignorant of the excesses that are being perpetrated almost daily by the priests; if however he is, His Honour finds it difficult to believe that he is fitted for his responsible religious post.”⁴⁵¹

Certain individual priests in the missionary cohort banded together by the MILL HILL Missionaries in Cameroon were singled out and considered ripe enough for expulsion from the territory. In the most diplomatic terms, the government did not hide its intention to rid the territory of these prelates who had become a danger to themselves and to the Mandated Territory. These priests were Fathers Van Dal, Moran, Stokman and Ham. His Honour was unable to express his opinion too strongly that Monsignor Rogan should remove Father Van Dal from the country. He went a step further and added that the excesses of other Fathers such as Moran, Ham and Stokman, who were now considered a danger to the peace of the Cameroons province, should receive serious consideration. The government was watching carefully and the time for action had come. Not only priests were on the list of those who attracted the eye and attention of the government for the wrong reason but also their immediate collaborators. They had done enough to incur the wrath of the administrators. The Secretary of the Southern Province concluded that, “there can be no doubt that the mission would be well advised to consider gravely the actions of some of the catechists who merit the severest measures taken against them.”⁴⁵²

In view of possible misrepresentation at Geneva, the appointment of a commission of inquiry into the conduct of the mission was carefully considered. His Honour did not desire, however, to make any such recommendation. He was unable to conceive that the mission would publicly misrepresent their case; to do so would undoubtedly lead to the publication of the grave scandals for which the mission itself was responsible. His Honour, however, considered that a strong protest should be made in order to emphasize the grave displeasure and concern of the government at the continual, scandalous behaviour of the priests of the mission. He suggested

⁴⁵¹ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Secretary southern Provinces F.Lynch, to the Honourable Secretary to the Government, Lagos June 12th 1931.

⁴⁵² BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Secretary southern Provinces F.Lynch, to the Honourable Secretary to the Government, Lagos June 12th 1931.

that any letter of protest should be sent by the direction of His Excellency. It was only a matter of time for the government to bring its full force to bear on the Roman Catholic Mission, which in the eyes of the government had lost sight of the gravity of the matter.

The mandate made the free exercise of religion subject to the condition that it was not prejudicial to public order. In this connection, the mandate gave to the mandatory power the right to exercise such control as was necessary for the maintenance of public order. The maintenance of order was the first duty of the Governor and order was a necessary condition for the full development of all freedom, not excepting freedom of religion. The missionaries had overlooked or lost sight of this. In fact, the mandate was clear. "Any regulations, therefore, arising out of the necessity for the maintenance of order will, if such order be genuinely endangered, be free from criticism, even should such regulations have the effect of restricting in some measure the free exercise of religion. On the other hand, any regulations on this subject which were to go beyond what is required for the maintenance of public order, any measure of a vexatious nature, or such might have the effect of restricting activities of the missions of any particular religious denomination, would be contrary to the terms of the mandate."⁴⁵³ The government took serious actions against the MILL HILL missionaries on these grounds.

Infant Betrothal and Sanctity of the Chief's Wives

The issue of infant betrothal and the sanctity of the wives of royals was an essential component of the culture in the mandate and it could not be ignored without serious repercussions. In the new dispensation, where the missions were considered a "marriage market," it was certain that trouble was brewing in the pipeline. There were two main causes of trouble between the chiefs of Mbo and Bangwa on the one side and the Roman Catholic Mission authorities on the other. Although a lot was written about Mbo and Bangwa, issues relating to infant betrothal and the sanctity of the wives of royals were

⁴⁵³ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Extract from the Minutes of Third session of the permanent Mandates Commission held at Geneva from July 20th to August 10th, 1923, Thirtieth meeting (plenary and public) held at Geneva on Wednesday, August 8th 1923 at 11 a.m.

not limited to these two ethnic groups or to the coastal regions. The trouble of the mission in the Grass Fields had the same roots.

The two parties harboured two different premises. The mission demanded that everyone, including women, who wished to seek refuge with them or attend their religious classes, was entitled to do so. Further, if a woman wished to marry a Christian man she was entitled to do so, provided the new husband was willing to refund the dowry. The Animists on the other hand, demanded that their old laws and customs be obeyed; otherwise, the administration of the country would become impossible. There were situations where a female child was betrothed on the day of her birth and her future husband commenced the payment of dowry for her from that time. The woman had no option but to marry that man when the time came. According to the government, "This delicate situation can only be met successfully with tact, great patience and education. It is an unfortunate fact that in certain cases both in Mbo and Bangwa the Mission representatives have failed to demonstrate either tact or patience."⁴⁵⁴

The attitude of administrative authority adopted by some of the Fathers and, consequently, reflected by their native catechists, furthered to a greater extent the ill feeling between the chiefs and the mission than the facts of most of the cases disputed. The government was of the opinion that,

"If the fathers would approach the chiefs with explanations and compromises instead of hard and fast demands, progress might replace the delay which threatened the influence of the mission." This reckless behaviour on the part of the mission did not help the course of Christianity at all. In the words of the Divisional Officer, "I do not think that there is any doubt that the mission influence in Northern Mbo and in Bangwa is less today than it was some years ago. The mission authorities refuse to see that this can in any way be accounted for by their own action in alienating the chiefs, but put the blame on the Administration for what they term its prejudice and lack of support."⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Divisional Officer, Mamfe Division to the Resident June 11, 1930.

⁴⁵⁵ *ibid.* Paragraph 19

Like in all other areas in the mandated territory, the approach of the mission could simply be termed insidious. The chief of Fotabong summed up the situation in the following words,

“First the father comes and asks the chief to give him some land and build a house and church. The chief, thinking it will be good for the country and keep his young men at home, agrees to this. The father then sends a catechist and from that day seems to have but one idea - to annoy the chief and direct his people to disobey him. What appears to be indisputable evidence that there is something wrong with the attitude of this mission is that the Basel Mission is welcomed and there never seems to be anything but satisfaction on the part of the chiefs at their work.”⁴⁵⁶

The earlier administrators in the Grass Fields apparently sided with the missions without empathising with the Fon. With assessment and reassessment reports, the British colonial authorities were able to see the other side of the coin. Initially in the grassfields, administrative officers were unable to appreciate the difficulties presented by the Fons. Over time, the colonial administrators were able over years of experience to have a glimpse of the reality on the group and better appreciate the cases put forward by the chiefs.

“The chief of a village is constantly irritated on minor matters, but does not care to bring a complaint as he is mentally unable to formulate his general irritation into a definite case. Thus, affairs go on until the catechist or visiting Father outrages his feelings beyond endurance and he then goes to an Administrative Officer with a complaint which is probably exaggerated considerably in detail, but which accurately represents his feelings, pent up for months. On this account, every Roman Catholic Mission in these areas must be regarded as a mouldering volcano. An Administrative Officer may pay two or three visits to an area and, in spite of asking if there are any complaints, none will be made. On a fourth visit, a chief may make a rather exaggerated complaint and on investigation it will be found that the grounds of the complaints are months old, but it has taken him all this time to express himself.”⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁶ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ibid. Paragraph 20

As in all scenarios, elopement of the wives of royals remained the immediate cause of trouble between the missions and the chiefs or Fons. The case of the chief of Fongven (Mbo) in 1928 is an excellent illustration and was the last eruption in Mbo. The chief's three wives attended the mission at Fongven, they began to spend more and more time there and, consequently, failed to do their domestic duties properly for their husband. The trouble between the chief and his wives became more and more acute and finally, after months of strife, they ran away to the mission compound and lived there. Father Ham complained to the Divisional Officer that the chief of Fongven had maltreated his wives and that they wished to be divorced. Father Ham said that justice could not be obtained for them in their own Native Court of Mbo as the chief of Fongven was a president of the court. The Divisional Officer ruled that the women should return to their fathers while the cases were tried in the Mamfe Native Court, which adjudged that in these peculiar circumstances the three women should be returned to their fathers, who should refund their dowries to the chief. This certainly appeared to be a suitable compromise, but the fathers of the women said that, as they were married to a chief, they could not accept the dowry paid. In the meantime, the women had gone once more to live in the mission compound so the chief took an action in the Mamfe Appeal Native Court. Father Ham wrote a letter to the Mamfe Appeal Court, pointing out his views on the cases and asking the court to take strong action. He also offered to pay any expenses. This letter, coming from a European, was calculated to influence the court. The appeal court upheld the original judgment. The chief of Fongven then lost his head; he ordered one of his Headmen to take out a summons for the three women to return to him (the Headman) as their husband. The chief himself tried the case and gave judgment that the women must leave the mission and return to their husband, thus reversing the judgment of the Mamfe Courts.

The next move was that Father Ham took the three women to the Baseng Mission (Kumba Division) although this was against the ruling and the judgment of the Mamfe Court. As soon as possible, the Divisional Officer visited Mbo and made a full enquiry into the ill feeling existing there between the Animists and the Christians, with special reference to this case whose results were forwarded to the Resident with certain recommendations. The Resident represented the case to the mission authorities with the result that these recommendations were eventually never actually agreed. Matters

then settled down to the usual smouldering condition. It is worthy of note that although the case of these women was finally tried by the Mamfe Appeal Court, which upheld the original judgment of the Mamfe Native Court, the dowry on none of these women was ever refunded to the chief of Fongven.⁴⁵⁸

A significant number of young girls of marriageable age or wives of commoners and royals, slipped away into the arms of the men at the mission. It was in this context that the mission was considered a marriage market: "The mission acts as a kind of marriage market and refuge for wives who wish to leave their husbands against Native law and custom. This in itself naturally makes the mission unpopular amongst the chiefs, as each of these marriages has been made in direct opposition to the wishes of the lawful guardians of the women."⁴⁵⁹ The chief of Foto Dungetet had a similar complaint, though this dated back to 1921. Once more Stanislaus was the catechist concerned and had interfered with the authority of the chief. The people of the village appeared to have found that the mission caused so much trouble that the numbers continued to drop until, in 1923, the mission in Fotabong was closed. In 1926, the chief was publicly abused at Fotabong by Father Scully for restraining his people from becoming Christians and this insult seems to have been the final blow to the Roman Catholic Mission work in this territory. The marriage of the chief's daughter against his wishes also contributed to his dislike of these missions.

The chief of Fotabong complained that a new mission compound had been opened at Njinata within his territory without his consent having been sought and, as it happened, against his wishes as there were already two mission compounds and he considered a third unnecessary. He complained also that Catechist Stanislaus was harbouring four strangers in one of the compounds without his authority. Assistant District Officer Gorges, who was visiting the District, told the chief to order the two catechists concerned and the four strangers to attend the next meeting of the Native Court, which was also the Native Authority. At the meeting, which Gorges attended, one catechist of the new mission and the four strangers were ordered to leave within one week. Both catechists went to Baseng (Kumba Division) and

⁴⁵⁸ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid

there saw Father Ham. Stanislaus told Father Ham that he and Boniface of Njinata had been ordered to leave Fotabong within the week. Gorges reported that the instructions were perfectly plain and that Stanislaus was well aware that he had not been ordered to go. Father Ham's order to them, however, was to return to Fotabong and carry on their work in spite of the order of the Native Authority. Father Ham wrote to the Divisional Officer saying that he had pursued this course as he had had no notification of the order and because the catechists were sure that the chief could not bring a well-founded case against them.

Yet another incident, which shows the way the Mission Authorities encouraged their catechists to ignore the Native Authority, became known during the trial of Stanislaus for "assault occasioning harm." There was a case of adultery in the Fotabong mission compound. Instead of reporting the matter to the chief, Stanislaus tried to settle the matter himself, with the result that the assault took place. When asked why he did not report to the chief, he said he could only report such matters to the Father. He further stated that he did report this case to the Father at Baseng in January and was told by him to let the matter wait until he next visited Fotabong.

The personality of the catechist, in addition to that of the father, played an important part in the relations between the chief and the mission. For example, Stanislaus was concerned in all the cases of complaint against the mission. He was at Fotabong during the crisis and was prominent in the Fongven case in 1928. While he was at Fonjungo in 1927, all the Northern Mbo chiefs held a meeting of protest against the mission and said they would never allow one of their women to marry a Christian.

In the midst of mounting cases against the Roman Catholic missions, certain guidelines were proposed by the administration. According to the Divisional Officer in order to improve the situation the following recommendations were made:

"Roman Catholic Mission should be asked to give an undertaking that they will not accept girls or women as catechumens without the consent of their lawful guardians by Native law (i.e. husband if married, father or brother if not married). Roman Catholic Mission should be asked to give an undertaking that they will not allow women to live in mission compounds unless they have been married and their husband live

with them and that they will not allow any person not a native of the town to live in the mission compound against the wish of the chief.”⁴⁶⁰

Throughout this controversy in 1928 and 1930, Monsignor Rogan argued in defence of Father Ham’s actions. He proposed to appeal against the conviction of Stanislaus and others and later proposed to ask the Government to hold an independent inquiry into the grievances of the Mission adherents against the Native Authorities. He later withdrew the appeal and request for an inquiry, largely on the advice of the Visitor, Father Wall. In his intelligence report of December 9, 1930, Mr. Macgregor stated that Monsignor Rogan had modified his views concerning relations between the Mission and Native Authority. He expressed entire agreement, considered Father Ham to be the source of the whole trouble emanating from Baseng and stated that he had repeatedly informed Father Ham that he was unfit to be in charge of a Mission Station. Monsignor Rogan stated definitely that, “Father Ham will shortly leave the Cameroons and will not return and that the other Fathers who came out in 1924 to 1926 such as Fathers Scully, Melvey and Robinson will not return.” He attributes these men’s failures in conduct largely to the evil influence upon them as newcomers to Africa of the views and conduct of the British plantation staff with whom they were often in contact during 1924-25. He stated that he had constantly complained to the mission that all his Fathers were newcomers to Africa and that in East Africa the mission never permitted a Father to take charge of a station until he had 10 years training under an experienced Father.⁴⁶¹

The Resident was of the opinion that Father Van Dal ought also to be sent home at once, but Monsignor Rogan wished to give him another chance in a different station. Father Van Dal was considered to have displayed a temperament of hatred and hostility to the native, which made him permanently unfitted for work as a Missionary in Africa. Even his immediate superior Rogan concluded that he [had] learned his evil practices from Father

⁴⁶⁰ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Divisional Officer Mamfe Division A.E. Tweed, to the Resident June 11 1930.

⁴⁶¹ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buca, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

Ham, but even so he [had] proved a very rapid learner and in the violence and brutality of his methods has outrun his teachers.

Particular attention was paid to the mission's repeated use of Yaoundé assistants in terrorizing the villagers of Baseng in July, 1930 and again in Illoani and other villages in February 1931, to intimidate the villagers by breaking into their houses at night, inflicting public floggings and acting as guards night and day to the captured women and girls. Father Van Dal's repeated seeking of men of this tribe to carry out his orders in spite of the Divisional Officer's warning was evidence of his intention to enforce his will by violence and intimidation. In consequence of the convictions, following the serious warnings given him less than a year before, Father Van Dal was considered ripe to be sent out of the country permanently. The Resident went on to note, "It is perhaps legitimate also to point out that, in his defence to the charge in case 43/31, Father Van Dal is so little certain of the facts of the Christian religion that he has confused the sixth and seventh commandments."⁴⁶²

The MILL HILL Missionaries seemed to be the pivot of the trouble emanating from every corner of the mandated territory. With few options left at their disposal, the colonial administration decided that it would assist in preventing future public scandal and exposure from similar investigations and trials if the Roman Catholic mission would submit, like other missions working in the Mandated Territory, the names of their men to Government on first appointment and when desiring to return to the Cameroons. Not only natives but also Europeans from other missions, the plantations and the commercial firms had been aware for some time of the repeated misconduct of this mission. When the inquiries began, a planter in Kumba Division expressed his pleasure to the Divisional Officer and remarked that the Fathers had frequently been guilty of conduct that would have led to the rapid punishment and expulsion of any other non-native. "If the provincial Administration should be blamed for slowness in learning and acting on the facts, it should be remembered that some hostility between the Christian Missions and natives of the older faiths is inevitable and that Administrative

⁴⁶²ibid.

officers have the right to expect the Missions to be upholders of high principle and conduct.”⁴⁶³

The tremendous discipline exercised by the European and native officials of the Roman Catholic Mission over the ignorant natives in virtue of their spiritual authority made it difficult for administrative officers to discover and deal with injustice committed by them. The native would seldom, if ever, take out a summons against his spiritual superior and was reluctant to make any complaints or to give any evidence against him.

Cases of interferences in Native Authority jurisdiction were not limited to Baseng. In annual report of Bamenda Division, the difficulties and dissensions caused by the Roman Catholic mission stations at Kumbo and Njinikom in Bamenda Division were analysed. At Njinikom the Father, who has been in charge during the last eighteen months, was described as an ignorant, tactless and fanatical Dutchman named Stokman. Correspondence between Father Stokman and the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, concerning the Tim of Esu Native Court case, with the Reverend Father’s insolent questionnaire based on the assumption that the Mission alone had the right to approve or disapprove of judicial decrees concerning a servant of the Mission, showed how the missionary had overstepped his boundaries. A letter from Divisional Officer, Bamenda, dated January 12, 1931, described at length Father Stokman’s tyrannical and oppressive use of his spiritual authority. The Divisional Officer, Bamenda, advised that the complainant should sue the Father for his illegally stopped wages. The man declined, but the administration was not willing to let matters go and agreed that Father Stokman should be prosecuted for the withheld wages under the Labour ordinance. If he were prosecuted for demanding labour by threats or for adjudicating without authority, it seems probable that the complainant’s acceptance of the first punishment task was considered an adequate legal defence although it in no way excused the Father’s calculated oppression.⁴⁶⁴

Father Stokman’s activities were viewed with disgust and the government was only waiting for an opportunity to cast the hook. His activities were considered a menace. The Divisional Officer reports, “During my recent visit to the Njinikom District, I ascertained that Father Stokman consistently

⁴⁶³ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.*

teaches his people contempt and opposition to their chief and that in consequences orders for cleaning of roads, repair of rest houses, etc., are disobeyed by the Catholic community. The lengths to which he will go in his petty hatred of all who do not belong to his fold are illustrated by the fact that he teaches his flock to refuse any salutation to the European staff of the neighbouring Baptist Mission and speaks of them in "Pidgin English" as "the people of the fire house," i.e. Hell."⁴⁶⁵

In his interview with Monsignor Rogan, E. J. Arnett, the Resident of Cameroons Province, was pleased to report that, while expressing no opinion on the Mban case, he (Rogan) did speak in emphatic condemnation of Father Stokman's general conduct and especially of his letter of April 1930. He expressed regret that Father Stokman had been left so long in charge of the Station, owing to the invaliding of another Father and of his intention to send Father Jacobs immediately to take charge at Njinikom. With every mission seen as a potential source of trouble, the government sought to limit the influence of the Catholic missions by limiting the licences granting applications to the Catholic missions. Applications made by the Roman Catholic Mission for the extension of their five-acre plot at Baseng, for the extension of the five-acre plot at Njinikom and for the grant of a Church and Rest House site at Abakpa, Bamenda were not granted. Arnett informed Monsignor Rogan during his interview that he could not recommend any further grants to the Mission until the Government received proof that the conduct of the Mission stations would be different in future.

The Thorny Issue of Married Women and Girls of Marriageable Age in Christian Enclaves

According to Arnett, it was clear from the investigations of Mr. Tweed and Major Cook and from individual complaints, that one of the principal causes of dissension between the people and the mission was that the Fathers and their African catechists had inveigled children and young girls under marriageable age into baptism and becoming catechumens without the knowledge or consent of their lawful guardians. They considered it illegal and unjust for the mission to act in this way and recommendations did not fall

⁴⁶⁵ibid.

short of demanding that the Government ask the Mission to cease this practice.

In the case of married women, the situation appeared rather different. In his report of June 11, 1930, Mr Tweed included married women in the same category as young girls. Unfortunately for the chiefs and fortunately for the mission, the Resident considered asking the mission to close its doors to married women, who may have deserted their husbands for good cause, to be going too far. The best native opinion and the best native courts had ceased to treat the married woman in all circumstances as the chattel of their husbands. The settlements of single women that had grown up round the Catholic Mission stations certainly proved to be a source of scandal and offence. With the problem of marriageable women everywhere, Arnett recommended that:

Such settlements not be on Mission land;

Such settlements be under the jurisdiction of the local village head and native authority;

No stranger be allowed to settle there, except with the permission of the village head; and

The village head was to keep a list of the stranger residents.

The Resident reiterated that such women were still subject to Native Authority and not under the absolute protection of the Mission; there was a fair opportunity for husbands to obtain an equitable settlement of their matrimonial disputes with the aid of the Native Courts and, in the last resort, to recover dowry money when the woman remarried.⁴⁶⁶

Disruptive Influence of Christian Enclaves

Through the Resident, the government expressed its strong displeasure at the actions of Father Van Dal as disclosed in the trials and at the methods adopted by several of the Fathers as revealed by inquiries in Kumba, Mamfe and Bamenda Divisions during the past three years from 1928-1930. One of the main objections to the methods of the MILL HILL Mission was their disruptive influence on the social organization of the native community. This

⁴⁶⁶ibid.

influence was particularly noxious in view of the fact that the existing social organisation was the fundamental basis upon which depended the successful constitutional development of the area through the medium of Native Administration. The Native Administrations were seen as an indispensable part of the machinery of Government in the Mandated Territory and the policy of the mission appeared to be aimed at defying them and breaking them up. The government saw this subversive action on the part of the mission as a threat to itself as well as the Native Administrations.

The policy of the mission appeared to favour the establishment of Christian enclaves in which adherents could settle and live in disregard of the traditional authority of their family or clan and in defiance of the Native Administration. In 1927, it was necessary to prosecute 25 inhabitants of a mission compound for refusal to pay tax. The defaulting taxpayers claimed that they contributed in money and unpaid labour to the mission and, consequently, should no longer be expected to pay Government taxes.

A great deal of mischief arose from the mistake of allowing enclaves on mission compounds. Local custom vested the head of the family or village with considerable power. Therefore, it was not surprising that, with the establishment of these “religious cliques” living in artificial compounds and separated from their rulers, the head of the mission compound, the catechist, usurped the traditional and lawful authority of the head of the house. It naturally followed that the sympathy with which the local chiefs had originally accepted the mission rapidly disappeared, replaced by suspicion and distrust as the power of the catechist increased. Unfortunately, instead of endeavouring to check the growing friction between their agents and the local chiefs, the missions appeared to have encouraged their catechists to disregard the authority of the Native Courts. This attitude was clearly indicated in the correspondence between Father Ham and the District Officer of Mamfe relative to an order by the Clan Head to a catechist, Boniface, to remove himself from Fotabong territory.

The Resident of Cameroons, commenting on the attitude of the Fathers vis-à-vis the Native Courts, the Native Authorities and the District Officer in exercising his powers of supervision of Native Court cases, all of them the constituted instruments of the mandatory Government, stated that their attitude of mind was unmistakable. “If a native were employed by or recognized by the mission, he was no longer under the jurisdiction of the

lawful authorities of the Province and any complaint about his conduct should be submitted to the mission.”⁴⁶⁷

Proselytising among married women also led to a great deal of friction and ill feeling towards the mission and has done much to widen the breach with local native people. A number of cases had been reported of the daughters of chiefs and others having been converted to Christianity against the wishes of their parents and later, again without their parents’ approval, married under the auspices of the mission. In almost every case, trouble arose in connection with the payment of dowry since the parents of the girl had made other marriage arrangements according to native custom, often on the day of the girl’s birth.

In addition to creating serious embarrassment to the Government policy of Native Administration in the Cameroons, the activities of the mission led to infringement of the law both by European priests and by their native following. Records of conviction and of complaints, which in the opinion of Administrative Officers could be successfully prosecuted, appeared in the personal records of individual members of the mission. Estrangement from their natural rulers and lawful jurisdiction led mission adherents to look elsewhere for settlement of their disputes, resulting in the priests and catechists unlawfully usurping the powers of the courts, an offence for which they were liable to be punished under the law. Priests apparently held quasi-judicial enquiries, administered oaths and sentenced delinquents to flogging, fines and punishment work. Missions became reformatory detention centres.

Having unlawfully taken upon itself judicial functions, it was not surprising that the Mission should want the equivalent of a police force to execute its summons, guard its ‘prisoners’ and augment the authority which it was able to exert by threats of expulsion from the Church or excommunication. To meet this need, it appeared from reports that the services of gangs of Yaoundé natives were enlisted. In the evidence in the proceedings against Father Van Dal on charges of assault and deprivation of liberty, there were reports of women and girls being ‘captured’ or ‘guarded’ by Yaoundé men and being held down while they were thrashed by European Priests. In one case, a woman of about 35 years of age was thrashed after her dress had been removed. A report by the District Officer

⁴⁶⁷ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Boua, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

of Kumba stated that a crowd of law-abiding villagers scented trouble and scattered to their houses at the sight of a gang of Father Van Dal's Yaunde assistants.

Apart from the illegality of their acts, the behaviour of certain European priests of the mission indicated a very definite attempt to impose their religious doctrines upon the native community by methods of intimidation and brutal violence. Such attempts were considered both repugnant to public opinion on the subject of religious toleration and in contravention of Article 7 of the British Mandate for the Cameroons.⁴⁶⁸ The Lieutenant Governor, Southern Provinces, considered that the activities of at least four of the MILL HILL Mission Fathers were a menace to the peace, order and good government of the Cameroons. He was most emphatic in his opinion that Father Van Dal should be removed from the country. Moreover, he considered that the cases of other Fathers warranted serious consideration.

The British administration considered Bakossi a delicate area, made so by the stress of an economic depression and the nearness of the French boundary. The missionaries seemed to worsen the threat to the peace and security of the country. For example, the mission took the stand that any woman who wanted to attend doctrine should be free to do so and any Christian woman should be free to marry another Christian provided they were willing to refund the "bride price". The morality of Catholics and the methods used by priests and catechists to ensure this freedom between 1928 and 1931, brought about the crisis. For example, the "floggings" by priests and the catechist Epie as well as a general disregard for the Native Authority created the recipe for the crisis which finally landed the Priests and Catechists in court.

On October 5, 1928, Monsignor Rogan wrote to the Acting Resident stating that he (Rogan) "must not give any individual Father reason to say that I condemned his actions without giving him a hearing". By March 20, 1930, Monsignor Rogan was put in a difficult position. Mr Arnett, the Resident, wrote to "strongly protest against defiance by Father Ham and teachers of catholic mission of the lawful authority of the chiefs and the Divisional Officer. It was dangerous to arouse the resentment of chiefs and people of the Mbo and Mbangwa areas, which were connected with a failure

BNA-SD/A 1931/4 ⁴⁶⁸THIRTEEN MEETING (Plenary and public) held at Geneva on Wednesday, August 8th, 1923, at 11 a.m. 214 LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE.

of trade and markets and with other discontent arising from other causes on the French side of the interim frontier. Finally, for the actions of the missionaries and teachers, which could provoke any open disorder, he promised to hold the Catholic Mission responsible for any consequences that could follow. In the presence of Father John Wall, who was on an official visitation from MILL HILL Headquarters between February and April 1930, the Resident warned Monsignor Rogan of the animosity roused”.⁴⁶⁹

There were more difficulties in 1931, even after Monsignor Rogan had promised the Resident that Father Moran would be going home for good. In April 1931, Father Van Dal was charged in Kumba court with three charges of assault and one charge of deprivation of liberty. He was found guilty and fined. Rogan met again with the Resident. This resulted in Mr. Arnett asking the Lieutenant Governor for the removal of Fathers Ham, Moran and Van Dal. The Lieutenant Governor replied listing his observations and said that unless Mgr. Rogan rid the country of the problem, the government would take action. In June, Father Ham sailed for Europe “for a rest” and Father McEvoy replaced him. Father Van Dal was allowed to stay because of his youth and the presumed bad influence of the more senior men. He went on to serve in Cameroon until 1965 when he left due to illness. He spent eighteen of those years in Tiko mission. He died on October 1, 1967, “in intense suffering with great patience” according to his obituary.

On September 27, 1931, the Governor General of Nigeria, Sir Donald Cameron, met with Rogan at Buea and demanded he give written assurance that fathers would not oppose the Native Authorities in their lawful functions.. Rogan did so on October 10, 1931, in a letter to the Resident explaining what action he had taken in warning the missionaries and sending home Fathers Moran and Ham. On November 5, 1931, Rogan informed MILL HILL that he had written an official letter to Mr. Arnett after October 10, 1931, informing him that he had asked the Governor for a commission of enquiry into mission grievances against the injustice of his policy against the Christians. According to Anthony Mbunwe, Rogan had discovered that the “success for the Catholic mission was dependent on his judicious use of special diplomacy and political tact.”⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁹ O’Neil op. cit.

⁴⁷⁰Ndi cit. op

The Abandonment of the Christian Enclave

Father McEvoy stayed at Baseng until January 1932. He was replaced by Francis Woodman on January 26th. Simon Staats replaced Father Woodman in November. A new era was beginning for Baseng mission and Bakossi. With the “spontaneous generosity” of Father Simon Staats and the help of Fathers Carney and van der Vlugt, they concentrated on education. Father Woodman thought the school was one of the foundations of the future of Bakossi even at the expense of the catchments.

Father Simon Staats was appointed to Cameroons and posted to Baseng where he made his first contact with “schools”. From a modest beginning at Baseng, often teaching class himself, this multi-talented missionary began a career of service to the Church and people of Cameroon that was to last more than thirty years. He was a man of foresight and a trusted collaborator of Monsignor Rogan. Cameroon Catholic education became the task of his life. Bernard Stukart became acquainted with Father Staats during his final years, when he was rector of Tombel. Father Staats kept a Baseng mission trek book, dated 1932 and from every page the difficulties of those early treks become evident. Lack of carriers and a dependence on the goodwill of local rulers, catechists, head Christians and untrained schoolteachers caused serious inconvenience. Although Father Staats was to become the right-hand man of Rogan for Catholic education, his first days in Cameroon were not those of other young missionaries.

Baseng was to become the most important mission and school in the interior of the forest. Father Ham had erected the compound on a hilltop overlooking the village. It was in the shape of a plantation manager’s house. Several missionaries who served at Baseng remember the feeling of isolation on that hilltop, pacing the veranda and looking down in anticipation whenever a potential visitor passed along the road below. It served a huge area and treks could last three months in “utter isolation.” In the school, the priest-teacher was the stimulus, most notably Father Staats. He was constantly at work both supervising teachers and teaching. On arrival, he immediately started to extend the school building, erect six new teachers’ houses, organize a football team and a drum and flute band and place hygiene and swimming on the timetable. He even set aside a reading room with two hundred and fifty books, admitted the first girls (146 boys and 11 girls) and began a school vegetable garden, a first aid post and weaving and

pottery classes. In 1939, after he had left, Baseng became a Standard VI Higher Elementary School.⁴⁷¹

The Trial and Conviction of Priests in the Dock

The Trial and Conviction of Father Ham

Peter Ham was born at Vooburg in Holland on March 13, 1892. The example of his parents' Christian faith made a deep impression on him. As a boy, he had a dream of becoming a missionary and erecting a mission station "somewhere in the hills and mountains." His dream came true in June 1926, when Monsignor Rogan sent him to Bakossi, an area that up to that time had been visited only infrequently by missionaries from Soppo. The Basel mission had converted many Bakossi people, mainly through their schools. Father Ham scrambled, like many missionaries before and afterwards, to "win souls" not only for Christ but also from the "infamous Baslers."⁴⁷²

As soon as Bakossi country heard of Peter Ham's appointment, catechist Pius Epie went to find their priest at Bota mission. Father Ham left with thirty carriers and arrived at Muetuk on July 28, 1926. Baseng mission was responsible for Kumba and Mamfe Divisions and 110 catechists. At Easter in 1927, he started a small school and so Sasse sent two teachers, James Ewang and Ambrose Ngome. When Ossing was closed, Baseng became responsible for twenty-three more catechumens. The young Father Ham may have felt himself a warrior for Christ in "Pagan" Bakossi, for he wrote years later, "I

⁴⁷¹ O'Neil Robert MILL HILL Missions to the Southern Cameroons

⁴⁷² Robert O'Neil (1991) Mission to the British Cameroons, Mission Book Service, St. Joseph's college, London. Footnote no. 33 pp. Rogan in a letter to Father Francis Figl on the 23rd of July 1939 as quoted by the same author, said "I have listened to the "Basle Peril" for so many years now from poor Fathers Ham, Doeswijk and others. Had Father Ham listened to reason nine years ago he could still be with us; but God and the church in Cameroon lost one of the most zealous priests...his lifelong...regret that he did not go softly-softly...How many thousands of souls he could have snatched from the infamous Baslers." In another case quoted by O'Neil in his book, "A retired Presbyterian Basle Mission teacher, Peter Fombi Akuro, told me that he too had battled with the Catholic Mission over schools. Wisely he observed that if not for the rivalry it is doubtful if Christian mission and education would have spread as rapidly as they did" Kwakom, Ambo, Moghamo, February 1984

started Baseng mission in honour of St. Michaels... God bless the ground and St. Michael drives the devil from the country!"⁴⁷³

He left Baseng and Cameroons for good in 1931. His years were few in Africa, but had such an influence on his outlook that he always considered himself a Cameroonian missionary. "He talked about Cameroon, he prayed for it, he supported it even with his own money. He spoke about Pius Epie as if he were even his best friend and Fathers Michael Moran and Peter Doeswijk became living persons... because in Father Ham's mind they lived on as examples of great pioneers of the Cameroon mission"⁴⁷⁴. In his memoir, he wrote that he would like "to die in Nkosse and have Bakossi buried around my grave ... but... I think we must wait till we meet in heaven."⁴⁷⁵ Until his death on February 27, 1967, he worked on behalf of the MILL HILL missions, travelling on his bicycle and building material support by his personal charm, his simplicity and his kindness. He had a dream, a champion in St Michael the Archangel and a character of which his eulogist wrote, "Though kind and considerate with regard to people, he would not give one inch of ground when he thought that the principles of the gospel were being tampered with. This led to serious problems with the British administration in Bakossiland."⁴⁷⁶

Complaints against the conduct of the Roman Catholic Mission in Bamenda and Mamfe Divisions became frequent in the late 1930. During the previous twelve months, frequent complaints had been made in Kumba Division, culminating in the conviction in the Provincial Court at Kumba of the Reverend Father Van Dal and a number of natives on three charges of assault and one charge of deprivation of liberty for forcibly removing thirteen women and girls from their homes to the Mission Station at Baseng. The evidence given at these four trials and not effectively denied by the accused, formed an astonishing picture of violence and brutality towards the natives more in keeping with recent reports of slavery in Liberia than with the conduct of a Christian Mission in a Mandated Territory.

In light of the previous complaints and the probability that a young priest not yet eighteen months in Africa would not have descended to such

⁴⁷³ Father Peter Ham cited in O'Neil op. cit.

⁴⁷⁴ Millhilliana, p. 101, 1967 in O'Neil op. cit.

⁴⁷⁵ Quotes from his (Fr. Peter Ham) Memoirs in O'Neil op. cit.

⁴⁷⁶ O'Neil (1991) op. cit. , p.44

degrading conduct without instigation or at least misguidance by his Superiors, the Resident proposed to make a full report on the past conduct of the Missions, the cause of previous complaints and the need for insisting that the Mission should take immediate steps to make such misconduct impossible in the future to the Honourable Secretary of the Southern Provinces in Enugu,

On September 14, 1930, Father Ham in response to a letter from the Divisional Officer, Kumba, expressed sorrow at the same time ignorance regarding the flogging of two Christians by one of the Fathers when he was on tour. In a remorseful tone he wrote "I beg you kindly to accept my sincere apology and firm assurance that there will be no repetition. I shall impress this on the assistant Priests. Some corporal punishment has been given before by way of penance, as a rule voluntarily accepted and even chosen by the delinquent rather than to be expelled from the community"⁴⁷⁷

At the end of February, 1931, complaints were made to the Divisional Officer, Kumba, by a number of persons from Illoani and other villages to the West of Kumba. They complained that two weeks earlier Father Van Dal had visited their villages and forcibly removed fifteen women and girls from their husbands and parents and taken them under guard to the Mission Station at Baseng. The Divisional Officer ordered the release of the women from Baseng and arranged for the women, the complainants and Father Van Dal to meet him at Kumba on March 4 1931. On his arrival, he saw a number of complainants, including the Chief of Illoani Village and the women and girls just released from Baseng. He questioned two of the girls whose ages were apparently twelve and fourteen.

Father Ham denied having used or authorized any force in removing the women to Baseng, but spoke of having held town meetings and persuading the villages to send their women to the Mission. He was ill with dysentery and, on the advice of the Medical Officer of Kumba, left the following day for Victoria Hospital and did not return until April 12, 1931. The trials took place on April 23 and 24, 1931. Before the trials took place, the hierarchy discussed the matter with the Divisional Officer of Kumba. They advised that, in the event of conviction on the charges of assault and deprivation of liberty, light sentences should be passed. First, they felt it should be taken

⁴⁷⁷ BNA-SD/A Correspondence from Father Peter Ham to the Divisional Officer of Kumba Division September 14th 1930

into account that Father Van Dal was only 26, had only been in Africa 18 months. He had almost certainly been misguided by Father Ham, the Superior in charge of his mission Station. Second, they felt that his actions, however brutal and detestable in themselves, were not inspired by personal interest or advantage but by the misguided belief that such methods and practices were necessary for the advancement of the Christian Mission.

Major Cook is said to have given these charges most careful trial and the sentences passed were considered the lowest compatible with the serious nature of the offences. The sentences passed on Father Van Dal amount to a total fine of £40 or five months' imprisonment; sentences of £1 fine or 14 days imprisonment were passed on sixteen natives who assisted Father Van Dal in committing the offences and carried out his instructions. The offences of Father Van Dal were greatly aggravated by the fact that in July 1930, similar complaints had been made to Major Cook's predecessor, J.S. Smith. Father Van Dal and his Superior, Father Ham, had been warned in the plainest terms against the infliction of floggings and punishment work with intimidation and Father Ham had given his word verbally and in writing that there would be no repetition.

It was noted that Father Ham, the Superior in charge of Baseng Mission Station, played a large part in the correspondence with the Divisional Officer of Kumba and that there were numerous complaints against his native catechist, Pius Epie. According E.J. Arnett, the Resident

"Father Ham had been in the Cameroons since 1924, for the first few years at Bota in Victoria Division. In 1926, in conversation with me, he spoke with such bitter hatred, contempt and impatience of the native Bakwiri that he ought not to be in Africa at all and certainly not as a missionary. In 1927, he was transferred to Mamfe and Kumba Divisions, where he opened the new station at Baseng. From 1928 onwards, there was a series of complaints to the Divisional Officer of Mamfe against Father Ham's high-handed and illegal actions, his interference with the Native Courts and his hostility to the Native Authorities. Mr. Carr, Mr. Aveling, Captain Denton and Mr. Tweed all took part in attempting to remedy these complaints, which culminated in the Stanislaus case in March 1930. The Divisional Officer of Mamfe convicted Father Ham's principal catechist, Stanislaus and five others of assault causing bodily harm and sentenced them to imprisonment.

Stanislaus was sentenced to 18 months and the other accused to 5 months each.⁴⁷⁸

The Conviction of Father Ham

Father Peter Ham of Dutch was Father Superior in charge, Baseng Mission Station in the Cameroons since 1924. For the first few years, he was at Bota in the Victoria Division. In conversation with Mr. Arnett in 1926, he spoke with such bitter hatred, contempt and impatience of the native Bakwiri that Mr. Arnett told him that he ought not to be in Africa at all and certainly not as a missionary. In 1927, he was transferred to Mamfe and Kumba Divisions where he opened the new station at Baseng. From 1928 onwards, Divisional Officers complained about Father Ham's high-handed and illegal actions, his interference with the native courts and his hostility to the Native Authorities, which culminated in the Stanislaus case in March 1930. The Divisional Officer, Mamfe, convicted Father Ham's principal catechist, Stanislaus, along with five others, of assault causing bodily harm and sentenced them to imprisonment; Stanislaus 18 months, the five others 5 months each.

It was said that Monsignor Rogan considered him the source of the whole trouble emanating from Baseng and as being unfit to be in charge of a Mission Station. Father Ham was alleged to have flogged and inflicted punishment upon the following: Fabian Epie of Meket: Flogged in public, with "bush rope," blood drawn, two weeks punishment work.

John Sone of Baseng: Flogged in public, severely, but no blood drawn, two weeks punishment work.

Aloysius Ntube of Baseng: Flogged, 20 lashes with bush rope, no blood drawn, two weeks punishment work.

Alexander Akwa of Bekume: Beaten with walking stick, 5/- paid besides in lieu of punishment work.

Gervasius Njumbe of Bekume: Flogged inside the church at Bekume.

Complaints were also received that Father Ham had been in the habit of persuading chiefs to order out their villagers, pagans and Christians alike, to build houses and do other work for the mission. The Chief of Baseng stated

⁴⁷⁸BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buca, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

that these requests, which were complied with in several cases, were made on the plea that there were not enough Christians there to do the work. The Chief of Ngob provided labour on the request of Father Ham at Baseng. Father Ham is said to have impounded cattle belonging to villagers of Ngombe when they strayed on to the unfenced property of the Mission. They were only released on money payments to the Fathers. The Chief of Ngombe himself is said to have paid about 23.10.d on this account.

If the various complaints that were received were justified, Father Ham had exposed himself to the following criminal charges: assault, assault occasioning harm, stealing, procuring abuse of office, demanding property with menace with intent to steal, compelling action by intimidation, threat and compelling action by assault. With the rope of justice narrowing in on him, Monsignor Rogan was realistic enough to say definitely, “that Father Ham will shortly leave the Cameroons and will not return.”⁴⁷⁹

The Conviction of Father Van Dal

Father Christian van Dal and three others purported to have assisted him were dragged to the Provincial Court at Kumba in April 1931. They were tried, found guilty and convicted on three serious counts of assault and one of deprivation of liberty. In all, Van Dal paid fines totalling forty pounds in lieu of five months’ imprisonment with hard labour. His three companions were sentenced to fines of one pound each or fourteen days imprisonment. The message was finally driven home and everyone, including the missionaries and the administrators, knew where they stood and who had had the last word. It was totally unheard of that a Whiteman and above all a Catholic missionary could be taken to an open court, tried, found guilty and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. The acrimonious relations between the Catholic Church and the colonial administrators had reached their lowest point.

The evidence given at these four trials and not effectively refuted by Father van Dal showed that he:

- Slapped the face of Lucy Ntu, consented to her being seized and having her hair shaved off by Yaunde men, had her held down while

BNA-SD/A 1931/4 ⁴⁷⁹Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buca, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

he beat her with a stick with such severity that blood was drawn and the marks were visible on the girl's buttocks some four weeks later. To crown it all, he gave her a kick.⁴⁸⁰

- Slapped Akpo on the face and beat her with a bamboo cane because she ran away when being escorted against her will to Baseng.
- Was present when the house of a woman named Akon was broken into at about midnight and Ikwo, her daughter aged 16, was taken away to another village.
- Beat Akon with a stick while she was holding a baby in her arms and made her go in front of him from Lobe to Kumba.
- Visited the house of a man in the middle of the night, turned his wife out of bed, kicked her and pushed her out into the street.
- Caused 13 women and girls to be taken to Baseng against their will and in a number of cases against the will of their husbands. These women were captured and guarded by Yaunde men who accompanied them even when they went to relieve nature.⁴⁸¹

On May 10, 1930, Father Van Dal went to the house of Koma of Baseng and asked him to point out his wife and another woman with whom he was living. Father Van Dal ordered the latter to go to the mission and then flogged Koma in front of his house. Later he ordered Koma to do 3 months

⁴⁸⁰..BNA-SD/A In the Provincial Court of the Cameroons Province Holden at Kumba before Major D.S. Cook, Divisional Officer, on the 23rd of April 1931. "According to the evidence given at the trial of Lucy Ntu admitted that "Someone told me afterwards that I received 52 strokes. I was crying bitterly and when he had finished he kicked me and ran out into the compound kicking me. I showed my backside to the woman with whom I had had come from Mbonge ...and it was covered with blood. I feel sick by blood coming from my private parts which was not my monthly periods. I admitted allowing other men to sleep with me and for the last four months I had lived with an Ibo man from Aru-Chuku. According to the Medical Doctor, Carmichael Wilson who was the medical officer of Kumba division "On the 20th March 1931 I was asked to examine the first witness Lucy Ntu. I saw her buttocks had 9 stroke marks four on the right buttock and five on the left. One of these strikes had drawn blood. If the beating has taken place four weeks before as the witness informed me the marks showed that it must have been severe beating"

⁴⁸¹ According to one witness during the trial " I was sleeping in my sister's house and the Father burst open the door"

‘punishment work’ to start the following day. The next morning Koma refused to carry out the task set- cutting grass and Father Van Dal struck him three times with a stick. Koma ran to his house. Later Father Van Dal approached Koma’s house with a gang of about 20 Yaundes. Koma ran off and the Yaundes pursued him, but did not catch him. An hour later, Koma returned to the village. A woman gave him food and warned him that the “mission people” would be looking for him again in the evening, so he returned to the bush and spent the night there.

On Koma’s running away, Father Van Dal went to Koma’s house with the catechist and opened the door. On the Father’s instructions, the catechist removed certain of Koma’s property, which Father Van Dal said he would keep until Koma returned from the bush. He then took out a box of matches and said that he would burn his house down if he (Koma)did not return. The news of the threat to burn down the house would have (meant the whole village) reached the chief; he called a meeting of the village at his house. While the meeting was in progress, about 20 or 30 “Yaundes” entered the building and surrounded the house. The chief was angry and sent a letter of protest to Father Van Dal. Koma did 6 weeks of work at the mission for which he did not receive any payment. It appears very much as if he was coerced into agreeing to carry out the ‘punishment work’ by intimidation. The various complaints against Father Van Dal appear to render him liable to the following charges: Assault, assault occasioning harm, attempting to deprive liberty, compelling action by intimidation, compelling action by assault, threatening violence, conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace, house breaking, stealing and abduction of girls under sixteen.⁴⁸²

The Resident considered that his Superior, Father Ham, had misguided Van Dal, who had only been in Africa a little over 18 months, but that Van Dal’s offences were greatly aggravated by the fact that he had previously been warned in the plainest terms. In the opinion of the Resident, Van Dal had displayed a temperament of hatred and hostility to the native, which made him permanently unfitted for work as a missionary in Africa.⁴⁸³ The Lieutenant Governor, Southern Provinces, was of the opinion that Van Dal’s presence in the Cameroons was a menace to the public peace and considered

⁴⁸² BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

⁴⁸³Ibid.

that he should be called upon by Monsignor Rogan to leave the country. Rogan, however, pleaded that Van Dal be given a second chance in another station.

In a confidential memorandum, C.6/1931 of October 24, 1931, containing notes of interviews and letters in connection with the above mission, exaggerated fears about further acts of Father Ham were evident. In the penultimate paragraph of the notes of an interview with Monsignor Rogan and His Excellency the Governor, it was noted that Father Van Dal would be given close supervision and not be in charge of any station. In view of Father Ham's previous record of acts of brutality, "Father Van Dal should not, at the present time at any rate, be allowed to travel through this Division with the exception of visits to Kumba and so prevent any possible recrudescence of his high-handed manner with native adherents to his religion."⁴⁸⁴

Mr. Arthur, Assistant District Officer, when engaged on the Bakossi Assessment spent four days at Baseng and so came in daily contact for that period with Father Van Dal. His impression was that, despite the reproof of July 1930 and the prosecution and conviction of April 1931, Father Van Dal's attitude was in no way chastened or showed in any particular form a change of heart and mind to his work in this country. Not all hope was lost. The Resident remarked "He is, as has been stated, very young and very inexperienced and if confined to Baseng and Kumba experience in native mentalities and matters will be gained, which should fit him in say a year's time to be a more restrained and effective missionary."⁴⁸⁵

In same memo about Van Dal activities, dated October 30, 1931, it was unanimous in stating unequivocally, "that Father Van Dal ought not to be touring the Village for some time to come. Even Monsignor was quoted as stating that he does not intend to allow Father Van Dal to do any touring in Kumba Division except to travel from Baseng to Kumba. In any case, Father Van Dal was shortly to go to Bamenda"⁴⁸⁶.

⁴⁸⁴ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buca, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buca, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931.

The Conviction of Father Michael Moran

Father Michael Moran was born on September 22nd 1895 in Ballyann in Ireland. He was ordained in 1921. On Saturday night, feast of the Annunciation, Father Moran with his companions had their first glimpse of Cameroon. For his first years in Cameroon he was stationed in Sasse. On April 19th 1923 Moran left for Kumbo. In his tenure as priest in Kumbo he exercised tact and successfully resolved matters of delicate nature. One would have expected Fr. Moran to do likewise down south. However, that was not the case. Father Moran's activities were grievous enough to warrant his removal from the country. This was seriously consideration because his presence in the Cameroons was a menace to the peace of the Province. Complaints received by the Divisional Officer, Kumba, from which it appeared that Father Moran, on May 24, 1930, called to his office two men, Nkume of Meket and Ndue of Baseng and a woman, the wife of Ndue and held an enquiry into an allegation of adultery against Nkume and the woman. At some stage of the proceedings, Father Moran administered oaths to Nkume, the woman and the Head Catechist, Hilarius and then they made their statements. After some investigation, Father Moran decided that it was Nkume who had committed adultery with Ndue's wife and administered flogging to both Nkume and Ndue, the one for adultery, the other for connivance. Whilst flogging Nkume, Father Moran appears to have given a number of lashes and then paused to question the woman and Nkume, then more lashes and another pause to repeat the inquisition, apparently in an attempt to make Nkume alter his original statement.⁴⁸⁷

Both Nkume and Ndue were ordered by Father Moran to do 3 months "punishment work" at the mission. Both absented themselves from the work after about a fortnight and were later sent for by the Father. Their fear after they had absented themselves was such that on seeing Father Moran passing, they ran into the bush and Ndue remained away from his home for three nights. Nkume, however, went up to the Mission in response to Father Moran's message and received a further flogging.

The Medical Officer who examined Ndue and Nkume some thirty days after the first floggings were administered stated that, in the cases of Ndue, 12 weals were apparent, blood - though not much - had been drawn in six places and that the flogging was comparatively severe.

⁴⁸⁷ibid.

The chief of Fotabong in Mamfe Division also complained that Father Moran deliberately insulted him and interfered with the administration of his territory. The chief complained that Father Moran flogged one of his chindas (personal attendants) for obeying his (the chief's) orders and not those of the Father. On another occasion, Father Moran told the chief that if he made another of his chindas do certain work, he would remove the man to the mission station at Baseng. Father Moran also insulted him by making him stand up for three hours while he abused him. It was customary for clan Heads and more important chiefs to sit. In connection with the Stanislaus case, Father Moran is said to have stated that unless Stanislaus was found not guilty by the court, he would have the Divisional Officer and the Assistant Divisional Officer moved.⁴⁸⁸

The Conviction of Father Stokman

The Resident described Father Stokman as “an ignorant, tactless and fanatical Dutchman, and suggested that he had made use of his spiritual authority in a tyrannical and repressive manner. During a visit to the Njinikom District, where Father Stokman was in charge of the Mission Station, the Resident, Mr Arnett, found that Father Stokman consistently teaches his people contempt and opposition to their chief” and “to refuse any salutation to the European staff of the neighbouring Baptist Mission.”⁴⁸⁹

Monsignor Rogan, in an interview with Arnett, spoke in emphatic condemnation of Father Stokman's general conduct and especially of a letter written by Stokman to the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, demanding detailed information about a Native Court case in which one of the mission catechists was involved. Arnett described the letter as an ‘insolent questionnaire’ based on the assumption that the mission alone had a right to approve or disapprove the judicial decrees concerning a servant of the mission. From the correspondence, it appears that Father Stokman was liable to prosecution on the following charges: adjudicating without authority, compelling action by intimidation, threats and conduct likely to cause a breach of the peace.

⁴⁸⁸BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, May 14, 1931

⁴⁸⁹ *ibid.*

The Trial of Father Schmidt

The Divisional Officer, Bamenda, took exception to the notions of Father Schmidt in connection with a court case heard by the Fungom Native Court. Father Schmidt and Father Stokman were at the time in charge of the Mission Station at Njinikom. On the subject of interference with the Native Courts, Divisional Officer, Bamenda, stated that neither of the Fathers at Njinikom were English and it was extremely difficult to make them understand their methods. On many occasions, they had been informed verbally and in writing that all complaints must go through the proper channels, namely the Native Authority and the Administrative Officer. There was hardly an order of the Native Authority or a Native Court case or complaint in which a Christian was involved that they did not discuss with the Christians concerned. The converts in their parish were beginning to think more and more that they are politically separate from the animists.⁴⁹⁰

The Conviction of Catechists

Conviction of Catechist Stanislaus

He was convicted in the Provincial Court, Dangwe Division and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment on a charge of Assault occasioning harm. Stanislaus, with five other Mission adherents, each sentenced to 6 months imprisonment, was responsible for an attack upon a man named Ngilifak, who was discovered sleeping with a self-confessed prostitute in the mission compound. Patrick Stanislaus and two other inmates of the mission discovered the pair. They beat the man, tied his arms and burnt his legs in fire. They told him that they would not liberate him unless he paid £5 to the four and gave them a goat. Monsignor Rogan's first reaction was to appeal against the sentence, but he later withdrew his application.⁴⁹¹

Conviction of Catechist Pius Epie

A deputation of adherents of the Mission at Baseng brought complaints to the Divisional Officer, Kumba, in June 1930 against Pius Epie, alleging that he was completely crooked and an extortionist, but had the complete confidence of the Fathers who employed him as an informer. They were sure

⁴⁹⁰ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid

the Fathers would not listen to any complaints against him. In addition to accusations of assault, Pius Epie was accused of demanding and receiving money under the threat of delaying the baptism of women converts who wished to get married. Pius Epie appeared to be liable to prosecution on the following charges: assault, assault occasioning harm, compelling action by intimidation, compelling action by assault, administering extra-judicial oaths, attempting to deprive liberty, threatening violence, conduct likely to lead to a breach of the peace, house breaking, stealing, demanding property with menaces with intent to steal and corrupt acceptance of gifts.

It seems that in 1930 complaints about the conduct of the priests were surfacing from every corner. They had become jittery, ready to react to the slightest provocation. The clerk of the Education Department complained of insults. He had attempted to offer a helping hand to load the lorry, but to his greatest surprise one of the Reverend Fathers, Herman Bats, hailed down on him, “you black monkey, make quickly, we are waiting on you,” in the presence of all other passengers. The complainant concluded that, “If some of these Dutchmen, who go about in this Province preaching to the people the Gospel of Christ, could call a black man a monkey to his face, I am sorry to say that they are worse than ‘Hitler’ who style Africans black monkeys in his Book. In fact, it is regrettable to have such men in this country who consider that every black man is a monkey and a fool. They will soon poison the mind of the Africans against the whites, which I am sure every good English man wants to prevent.”⁴⁹²

With such scandalous trials and convictions of priests and catechists in the courts, Monsignor Rogan had no choice than to act decisively. He was under pressure from the colonial government. The existence of the entire missionary enterprise became precarious. The trials and convictions in Kumba Division and the visit of the Lieutenant Governor had left no one unsure about who the real power brokers were in Cameroon. Owing to radical and senseless opposition to the native administration and their own unwise and tactless actions, the MILL HILL missionaries were on the verge of been expelled from the territory they had come to see as their own. Monsignor Rogan had personally been visited and made to see the gravity of

387 BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Memorandum from the Clerk, Education Department to Rev. Father Simon Peter Staats, Supervisor of the Roman Catholic Schools, Buea, November, 6, 1942.

the actions of his priests. It was time for him to make a public undertaking and the government was watching.

The Dilemma of Monsignor Peter Rogan, O.B.E, Head of the Mill Hill Mission

Monsignor Rogan, who had asked the Commission to inquire into the grievances of the mission, appealed against sentences passed upon Catechist Stanislaus and the other Christians who had been charged and convicted of assault occasioning harm later withdrew the appeal. The Lieutenant Governor acknowledged that Monsignor Rogan was head of this mission, responsible for his priests in the mandated territory and ultimately responsible to Rome, but expressed doubts about his ability. From the prevailing situation, it appeared that Rogan was not able to exercise control over the actions of his priests and that either an entirely different attitude had to be adopted or, as a final alternative, Government had to rid the territory of this continual cause of disturbance and interference with Native Authorities. In the Resident's report, Rogan "deprecates the resort of Christians to the Native Courts and encourages the separate settlement of all cases in which Christians are concerned. Such a policy inevitably tends to the creation of separate communities denying all allegiance to the Native Authorities."⁴⁹³

Rogan was considered quite incapable of realizing that the Roman Catholic and other Missions had been quite successful in Nigeria, carrying out their work on reasonable lines without interfering in political matters. "It is scarcely credible that Mgr. Rogan, especially after a serious warning had been issued to him, is entirely ignorant of the excesses that are being perpetrated almost daily by the Priests; if however he is, His Honour finds it difficult to believe that he is fitted for his responsible religious post."⁴⁹⁴ On June 25, 1930, the Divisional Officer, Kumba, received a deputation of 58 Roman Catholics who, in lodging several complaints against the Mission, said that on Christmas 1929 they wrote to Monsignor Rogan, petitioning against

⁴⁹³ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, October 3, 1931.

⁴⁹⁴ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, October 3, 1931.

Father Ham's ordering punishment work and giving floggings, but that their petition was not acknowledged. When the very Reverend Father Wall and Monsignor Rogan visited the Resident of Cameroons, Arnett, in December 1929, the point was again raised.

He totally rejected the suggestion for a Commission of Inquiry to examine the conduct of the Mission in view of a possible misinterpretation at Geneva, the headquarters of the League of Nations. He, however, did recommend a strong protest at the direction of His Excellency the Governor General himself in order to emphasise the grave displeasure of the Government at the on-going scandalous behaviour of the priests of this mission and this was what, practically, happened. It was, therefore, not surprising that H.E. Sir Donald Cameron, the Governor General of Nigeria, paid an official visit to Southern Cameroons a couple of months later and granted, exceptionally, Monsignor Peter Rogan an audience.

Visit by the Governor General of Nigeria

As intimated by the Lt. Governor, His Excellency, Sir Donald Cameron, the Governor General of Nigeria paid an official visit to British Southern Cameroons in September 1931. Since the conflicts between the Catholic Mission and the Administration over Native Authorities constituted a burning issue in the Mandated Territory and serious thought was being given to the expulsion of the Catholic missionaries, he granted an interview to Monsignor Peter Rogan, OBE, Prefect Apostolic of Buea, MILL HILL Superior, on September 27, 1931. The Governor summarised the situation with regard to the conduct of the Catholic Mission and gave details of the complaints and charges levied against individual Reverend Fathers. From studying all the reports, he had doubted Rogan's competence in controlling the Fathers, but felt convinced on meeting him personally that he did indeed possess it. In fact, in other official quarters, it was thought that Rogan should have made a better civil administrator than a church minister and it was openly regretted that, by his choice of a religious vocation, "Ireland and possibly Britain" had lost a great character and the stage "a great actor."⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁵ NDI, Anthony Mbunwe (2005), *MILL HILL Missionaries in Southern Cameroons*, Paulines Publications Africa Nairobi

For his part, the MILL HILL Superior admitted that the conduct of several of the Fathers was “very wrong,” and that he had continually told them precisely so. He had already sent home Father Ham, the worst of the offenders and had always been willing to cooperate whenever the Resident appealed to him. Nevertheless, while confirming this statement, Arnett interposed to state that, the general feeling of Residents and Divisional Officers in the Cameroons was that the attitude of the Fathers was hostile to the Native Authorities and thus, to the British Government as well. Rogan further explained that the Fathers were young and inexperienced and so, unfit to take charge of Mission Stations. Their position was made more difficult because the Christians in many cases did not receive justice from the Native Courts and, when they complained to the Divisional Officers or the Resident, they did not obtain a sympathetic hearing. Here, the Governor reassured him that, when dissatisfied with the decision of a Divisional Officer, he could appeal to the Resident, Lt. Governor, or directly to him at Lagos. Monsignor Peter Rogan was granted the special privilege of communicating directly with the Governor General of Nigeria at Lagos in case of grave need. This concession made by the Governor General himself in the presence of the administrative hierarchy, including the Resident of British Southern Cameroons, should be given the significance it deserves because it put everybody else on their guard.

Further discussions centred on whether Moran, Van Dal and Stokman should be permitted to continue to work in the Territory. The Governor pointed out that in future any offences by the Fathers would be prosecuted in the Provincial Court. However, as for Moran and Ham, Rogan acknowledged that they were presently on leave in England and Holland respectively and would not return. But Christian van Dal and Stokman were very young and he wished to give them a further trial. As they were not due leave for some years, he promised to give them close supervision. Further, they were not to be placed in charge of any Mission Stations. The Governor agreed with all this but demanded that Rogan should give a written assurance that the Fathers would not oppose the Native Authorities in their lawful functions.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁶Ndi op. cit.

This historic meeting definitely marked the definite resolution of the crisis in Catholic Mission - Native Administration - Colonial Administration relations. Following from it and before submitting the written assurance demanded by the Governor, Rogan held another round of official discussions with Arnett on October 2, 1931, to straighten things out. He continued to emphasize the inability of the priests and converts to obtain redress from the Divisional Officers or the Resident when Native Courts proved openly unjust to the Christians. He cited examples in Bamenda Division, where Divisional Officer Carr dismissed twenty of such appeals in a single day in 1928. Tweed in Mamfe, in 1930, also wrongly designated Njenata as a new Mission Station that had been forcibly opened without obtaining the permission of the Chief of Fotabong, whereas, actually it was an old mission. This led to a series of Native Court trials, wanton beatings and convictions of catechists and Christians. Furthermore, whereas, Christians who married divorcee wives of polygamous husbands usually refunded the appropriate bridal wealth, Christian husbands got no help either from the Native Courts or from the Divisional Officers when their wives left them for non-Christian husbands and they desired to recover the bride price paid for them under the approved Marriage Ordinance. The Apostolic Prefect wanted every single doubt clarified and concretised before venturing to produce his declaration of assurance for the Governor General of Nigeria.

Finally, Resident Arnett gave emphatic and unqualified assurance on behalf of the Government to Monsignor Peter Rogan that henceforth he would give careful and balanced consideration to all representations from the missionaries, catechists and Christians concerning decisions of Native Courts or Divisional Officers that appeared unjust or based on inaccurate information. In the case of Christian marriages under the Ordinance, the Administrative Officers, he repeated, were bound strictly by the terms of the law. Once again, but this time at the highest official level possible, the grave, perennial differences between the Catholic Mission and the Administration were ultimately resolved and Rogan promised to write the famous "Letter of Assurance" to the Governor General of Nigeria through the Resident of British Southern Cameroons. There was no agreed formula, but on October 10, 1931, he produced his pledge. Thereafter, he also issued firm instructions to all Fathers to send him full information of any Divisional or Native Court findings with which they were dissatisfied instead of taking the law into their own hands. He made it abundantly clear to them that even minor assaults

would be sufficient reason for him in future to repatriate any priests. In conclusion, Rogan remarked that in 1926 he had advised MILL HILL to recall certain Fathers whom he, “had already then judged lacked the qualities that life in Africa demands.” He had also since then relieved one Father permanently of his superiorship, changed several more to other districts and forbade two others to write either official or unofficial letters to Divisional Officers. Finally, neither Ham nor Moran, who had already gone home on leave, would return to West Africa. While defending the rights and privileges of his priests to the very last ounce of his energy, Rogan made a clean breast of their transgressions in a transparent and convincing manner that left no one in doubt about his sincerity and his determination to live up to his solemn promise.⁴⁹⁷

In perspective, in making his appeal, Rogan had at the back of his mind a long history and litany of mistrials against the Christians throughout the territory. Besides the unrecorded persecution of the priestless period (1915-1922), conspiratorial charges had been mounted against scores of Christians in Nso and Kom leading to unjustified and extra judicial prison terms imposed by Mr. N.C. Duncan, the Divisional Officer working in league with the Fons of Nso, Kom, Babungo and several others. These had been so openly unjust that the Resident, Major Ruxton, had asked Duncan to personally quash them lest they got to the knowledge of the League of Nations. Duncan openly detested the activities of the French Sacred Heart Fathers and their adherents in the Division, regarding them as subversive elements. In one such instance, he confirmed sentences ranging from one to five years hard labour on a group of Christian princes who had been tried and found guilty of spurious offences against the authority of the Fon of Nso in the Native Court over which Fon Ngah himself presided. Actually, before the appeal, they had been sentenced to death, a sentence far in excess of the powers conferred on the court by the Native Authority Ordinance. At We, in Wum Division, the Chief openly declared that he would never give any court judgement in favour of Christians, a fact that was made known to the Divisional Officer at Bamenda, while at Mamfe, besides blatant injustice, Christians who refused to swear by the “Mfam,” a pagan cult, were sure to

⁴⁹⁷Ndi op. cit.

lose their case. All of these excluded some of the trumped up charges levied.⁴⁹⁸

On Saturday, October 10th 1931, he made a fundamental undertaking giving the necessary guarantees that any Father who recklessly interferes with the legitimate business of native courts and with the lawful jurisdiction of Native Chiefs will be expelled from the country.

“In view of the fact that the reprehensible actions of several MILL HILL Fathers have unfortunately led His Excellency the Governor, Yourself and other Officers to believe that we refuse to recognize the authority, rights, dominion, powers, jurisdiction etc. etc. of Native Chiefs, Presidents of Native Courts and others, I hereby give His Excellency, through you, the Resident of Cameroons Province, my guarantee that any Father who recklessly interferes in any obstructive way with the legitimate business of Native courts and with the lawful jurisdiction of Native Chiefs, will be sent out of the country by me immediately, even if his action is not brought to the notice of the Administration.”⁴⁹⁹

He concluded that, several years ago, from his arrival in Cameroons in 1926, he had already advised MILL HILL to recall certain Fathers, who he had judged as lacking the qualities that life in Africa demands.⁵⁰⁰

What is perhaps striking about the attitude of the Baseng Christians towards Father Peter Ham is the fact that, some twenty years after he had literally been expatriated from Cameroons, they still had very Fond memories of him and, in 1966, actually spontaneously wrote a very emotional letter pleading with him to return even without consulting the hierarchy⁵⁰¹.

Overall, the Fathers complained that although some of the Divisional Officers “were nice to your face (and) came to mission ... for dinners and drinks,” they helped them very little against hostile chiefs. Rather, they

⁴⁹⁸NDI, Anthony Mbunwe (2005), *MILL HILL Missionaries in Southern Cameroons*, Paulines Publications Africa Nairobi

⁴⁹⁹ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Letter from Monsignor Rogan to the Honourable Resident, Cameroon Province, Sunday October 10, 1931

⁵⁰⁰ Letter from Monsignor Rogan to the Honourable Resident, Cameroon Province, Sunday October 10, 1931.

⁵⁰¹ Ndi op. cit

bothered them “every week (with) an official letter about some silly palavers.” This of course demonstrates the naivety of the missionaries, who were largely ignorant of the actual role of the Divisional Officer and the fact that his primary function was to maintain, defend and promote the authority of the very chiefs and Fons that the missionaries regarded with scepticism bordering on scorn. Actually, to many Administrators, the missionaries were obstructive, meddlesome, irrelevant and “a totally undesirable sect.” Even if the missionaries were aware of the role of the Administrative Officers, there was bound to be clashes arising from “women”, particularly, chief’s wives. Catholic teaching strongly precluded polygamy and polygamy was the hallmark of chieftaincy, nobility and wealth. This was the basic source of friction between the Mission and the Native Authorities practically in every area and one to which until independence there was no solution in sight.

In a confidential letter, May 14 1931, the Resident quoted Monsignor Rogan as stating that Father Ham would leave the Cameroons shortly and that the other Fathers who came out in 1924 to 1926, such as Fathers Scully, McEvoy and Robinson, would not return. In his (Resident) opinion, “Fathers Ham and Van Dal should both go and neither return to the Cameroons.”⁵⁰² While the MILL HILL Missionaries were been brought to book for their own actions, across the frontier the French in the French speaking Cameroon were dismantling a similar edifice: the sixas.

“Les missionnaires catholiques jouaient un rôle central dans les efforts à éduquer les peuples indigènes de Cameroun, partie de la “mission civilisatrice” que les français s’attribuaient. Empressés à avancer la propagation du Christianisme, les Catholiques cherchaient à éduquer les femmes et les mères chrétiennes en établissant des écoles de filles dont la mise au point des cours d’études était presque exclusivement sur la religion et les sciences ménagères. A côté des écoles de filles proprement dites, les missionnaires tenaient aussi une institution spéciale appelée sixas, partie de la campagne de l’église contre la polygamie et la cohabitation pré-maritale. Conçue à l’origine comme des écoles internates du catéchisme pour les fiancées des convertis natifs, les sixas devenaient les refuges des femmes qui s’échappaient des mariages polygames et servaient du tremplin de l’intervention de l’église dans la culture native. La prolifération des sixas

⁵⁰² BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buca, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, October 3, 1931

partout dans le territoire du mandat français du Cameroun causait de mécontentement intense parmi les hommes natifs et des Fonctionnaires coloniaux; tous les deux prenaient la position que les sixas produisaient du désordre et minaient à la société traditionnelle des tribus. La tension dans les relations entre l'église et l'état éclatait finalement en 1930 dans "l'Affaire des Sixas," au cours de laquelle l'administration coloniale menaçait à fermer les sixas sous le prétexte qu'elles étaient illégales et menaçaient l'ordre public. A fin de réduire les soucis gouvernementaux l'église élargissait les programmes des cours d'études des sixas, les transformant en institutions académiques régulières."⁵⁰³

A review of the annual report for Kumba Division from 1926 to 1934, the years before and after the crisis, would leave one with the impression that the Baseng Mission crisis was an isolated case. Nothing in these annual reports hinted on the danger posed by the priests as portrayed in the trials. Even the annual reports for 1931 and 1932 remained almost silent. Apart from the 1928 report that mentioned that there was some trouble with the

⁵⁰³ The Affaire des Sixas and Catholic Education of Women in French Colonial Cameroon, 1915-1939, Kenneth J. Orosz French Colonial History, Volume 1, 2002, pp. 33-49 (Article). The Catholic missionaries played a central role in the efforts to educate the indigenous people of Cameroon as part of the civilizing mission, which the French wanted to instil as a means of evangelization. The Catholic missionaries sought to educate the women and Christian mothers by establishing schools for girls in which the curriculum was exclusively devoted to religious formation and home sciences. Besides the school, the missionaries also had a special school called sixas, which was part of the campaign against polygamy and pre-marital cohabitation. Conceived originally as a boarding school for catechism for the fiancés of converted native Christians, the sixas became a refuge for women escaping polygamous marriages, necessitating the intervention of the Church in the tribal culture. The proliferation of sixas in the Mandated Territory of Cameroon incensed the natives, bringing about discontent, especially among the men and colonial authorities. They were of the opinion that the sixas brought about disorder, ruining the setup of the traditional society. The tension between the church and the state came to a head in 1930 in the famous "L'affaire des sixas" in which the colonial administration had to close down the sixas on the pretext that that they were illegal and a menace to public peace. However, in order not to lose government support, the Church had to improve on the programme of studies of sixas and transform them into regular schools (Author's Translation)

Basel mission over a medallion, nothing smacks of the magnitude of the crisis depicted in the cases against Father Ham and Van Dal.

In the 1926 Kumba Division Annual Report of the mission on education, it was noted that in spite of continual attempts to encourage the attendance of girls at schools, female education was still regarded with caution and no girl pupils were found outside Kumba and Nyasoso. When Village Groups and Village Heads were questioned, they expressed themselves as being in favour of girls attending school, but had not yet convinced the mothers, whose chief objection seems to have been the loss of their daughters assistance in the many household and farm tasks that were their lot at the point.

The Roman Catholic mission had no schools teachings non-religious subjects. The Basel mission schools, which were primarily for instruction in religious subjects, taught to an elementary degree the “three Rs”. The mission authorities argued that this was essential to the proper learning of doctrine, but they admitted that the instructions given in these lay subjects were of little value to the pupils in other ways.

The 1927 Kumba Division Annual Report sounded an optimistic note for the future of the Church. It appeared that the Native Authorities were beginning to understand their relationship with the Mission and that the mission teachers and Catechists also realized that their activities were to be confined entirely to religion without any interference in local politics. At any rate, no complaints of coercion, ill treatment, or intrigues were noted. This could probably be ascribed to the addition of more European staff at the Basel and Roman Catholic Missions, who were enabled to supervise more closely the activities of their African members. It was admitted by the supervisor of both missions that their African personnel were, in some cases, not all that could be desired. This attitude was a complete change from that adopted a year ago and, if maintained in the future, it was hoped it could do much to dispel the uneasiness with which mission representatives were regarded by some of the more primitive Native Authorities.

The 1928 Kumba Division Annual Report mentioned the names of the three Catholic priests present in Baseng. The three Roman Catholic Fathers were Ham, Moran and Doeswijk. A large portion of their time was spent in travelling. This mission had churches and catechumenates throughout the Division. The Basel Mission operated in the eastern part of the division, going as far as to include Balong (Bafu), Bakundu, Balue, Barombi, Bafaw,

Ekumbe and Balong areas. The rivalry between the Roman Catholic Missions and Basel Missions led to a complaint by the former that a European of the latter mission had removed a medallion from a woman's neck. There was no evidence to substantiate an assault. The Basel Mission declared that the woman had for years belonged to the Basel Mission and had voluntarily surrendered the medallion. At Illoani, on the visit of Father Doeswijk, the Catholics desired to have a "play". The pagans, however, objected to any noise as, on account of the phase of the moon, rites had to be performed to their ancestors. The Catholics showed creditable tolerance by refraining from making the "play". In May, Father Doeswijk of the Roman Catholic Mission wrote complaining that the Balue Native Court had ordered all the male Catholics who wished to marry to come to the Native Court with their intended wives and the intended wives' parents; the parents in many cases were too old to make the journey. The Native Court was informed by the Divisional Officer that they must not call anyone who wished to get married to the Court unless there was some objection to the marriage taking place. The procedure of sending copies of Marriage Notices to the Native Courts under whose jurisdiction the contracting parties resided had proved satisfactory. If any objections were raised to the marriage taking place, the persons concerned were to be sent by the Court to the Divisional Officer. This arrangement had worked satisfactorily. Very few such objections were raised.

To make the position clear the following circular, dated June 29, 1928, was sent by the Divisional Officer to the Native courts:

"The Registrar will in future always send copies of Marriage Notices to the Native courts under whose jurisdiction the contracting parties to the proposed marriage live. These notices will be posted up outside the Native Courts and the attention of the public called to the fact that they are so posted. Any person who has any good and sufficient reason to object to the proposed marriage should then be sent with the parties concerned to the Divisional Officer within 21 days of the date of issue of the Marriage Notice."⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰⁴ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buca, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, October 3, 1931

The matter was explained to the Native Court scribes in February by the Divisional Officer. It was pleasant to be able to record that no serious friction between the Christian and non-Christian members of the community had occurred.

The 1929 Kumba Division Annual Report sounded no alarm. Everything seems to have been noted as satisfactory. The Buildings at Dikome Balue, commenced in May 1928, were noted as progressing satisfactorily. The mission generally was making headway and there was practically no friction with animists. Mention was also made of the increase of marriages under the Ordinance due to the influence of the missions. The church at Ikassa was licensed for marriage in November. The Roman Catholic Mission had a primary school at Baseng, which was supervised by a European missionary in residence. The Basel Mission had 87 vernacular schools.

The 1930 Kumba Division Annual Report indicated that a little friction was experienced with certain persons of Baseng and the Roman Catholic Mission in July 1930. The establishment of "convents" for prospective Roman Catholic adherents adjacent to the mission buildings presented the possibility of trouble and misunderstanding. The women were so congregated in order that they might learn Christian doctrine, domestic arts and housewifery. It was certainly these "convents" that finally led to the trial of the Roman Catholic priests of Baseng.

The 1932 Kumba Division annual report stated that the MILL HILL Fathers had their old station at Baseng and had opened a new station during the year at Ikassa, at which two fathers were stationed. Relations between this mission and the Government in this Division had improved so much that they could be described as more cordial in 1932 than in 1931.

According to the 1933 Kumba Division Annual Report, the Roman Catholic Mission of the MILL HILL Fathers had two stations in the Division. Four Fathers had been stationed at Baseng until one was transferred to Mamfe. One Father was in charge of the large elementary mission school while the other two Fathers toured the large area in which they had their churches. The second station was at Ikassa and was on grounds belonging to the Gesellschaft Sub Kamerun. Two Fathers were stationed there. A slight contretemps arose with this mission at Mbonge Marumba on a site owned by the mission. Unfortunately the mission fenced off a piece of ground against the wishes of the village council and it was found that this ground was not the site owned by the mission. It was thought

that an amicable settlement between the village council and the mission would be reached. Certainly, the change of command and approach at Baseng had brought about change in relations with the mission.

Mission Policy in Southern Cameroons Province in Retrospect

With increasing friction between the missions and local chiefs, the Acting Lieutenant-Governor was forced to clarify matters in view of the difficulties that had arisen in the Bamenda and Mamfe Divisions of the Cameroons Province because of the attitude of the Roman Catholic MILL HILL Mission towards the Native Administrations. A serious situation arose among the Mbo and Bangwa tribes of the Mamfe Division for two reasons. First, the people were largely dependent upon local trans-frontier trade. The establishment of preventive stations without the simultaneous establishment of customs stations resulted in the inhabitants of the British and French areas wishing to cross the frontier for the purposes of this trade having to walk three or four days to a customs station to pay a few pence duty and then walk back to the market they intended to visit. Secondly, there was friction between Pagans and Christians.

The Governor demanded a full report on the situation with particular reference to the attitude of the Roman Catholic Mission. In addition to the general question of the attitude of the Mission towards the Native Administration, a particular instance arose in the Bangwa Division. A man was severely flogged and injured by a catechist on the grounds that he had committed adultery in the mission compound. The case was started in the Native Court, but, in view of the serious nature, the District Officer transferred it to his own Court. He sentenced the catechist to eighteen months imprisonment, which was later confirmed by the Chief Justice. Upon hearing of the conviction, the head of the Mission, Monsignor Rogan, telegraphed to the Resident saying that he wished to appeal the sentence. Later he informed the Resident by letter that he wished to withdraw his application to appeal and desired instead to ask for a Commission to enquire into the Mission's grievances.

There can be no doubt that the conviction of the catechist and others was right and the sentences justified and in itself the case was of minor importance except as showing the danger of delegating to catechists the power to punish the members of their congregation. Monsignor Rogan's

request for a Commission for Enquiry raised, however, the larger and much more important question of the general policy of the Mission. From the administrative point of view, the important features of the Mission's policy at the time were as follows: the desire of the Mission to create large mission compounds in which Christians might settle and live independently of their family and village organization and the authority claimed for the catechist, allowing him to settle criminal cases.

Under the Mission of the Sacred Heart at Bamenda, which had remained immediately after the war under the charge of Monsignor Plissonneau, considerable difficulties were experienced because of the creation of large mission compounds and the MILL HILL Mission policy of creating these compounds ceased. Their establishment continued to be a source of anxiety and an example of the difficulty experienced was seen at Njinikom, where in 1927 it was necessary to prosecute 25 of the inhabitants for refusal to pay tax. They claimed that, as they contributed largely in money and unpaid labour to the Mission, they were no longer liable to Government for tax or compulsory paid labour.

Until a few years ago the missionaries as a rule, while encouraging the catechists to mediate in civil cases between Christians, forbade them to interfere in criminal cases sent to the Native Court. The present head of the Mission, Monsignor Rogan from East Africa, where each sect was allowed to settle in enclosures set apart for them and in which the catechist became the headman responsible for that area to the Administrative Officer. He deprecated the resort of Christians to the Native Courts and encouraged the separate settlement of all cases in which Christians were concerned. Such a policy inevitably tended to the creation of separate communities denying all allegiance to the Native Authorities.

In the 1920s, a situation arose at Banso in the Bamenda Division where two or three priests were stationed. There, however, the chief and the priest-in-charge agreed to co-operate. The latter ordered his catechists to prevent the separate trial of cases in which Christians were concerned and to abandon the policy of separate compounds and in return the former guaranteed that women converts living with their families should have full liberty to attend the mission and to marry the Christians of their choice. He further promised that churches might be built in any villages where there were Christians. The results were excellent. The missionaries stated that they obtained more converts and the amicable relations between Christians and

pagans had a beneficial effect upon the community as a whole. There was, however, a grave possibility that the Mission's new policy had the potential to undo the good work of the past.

There were three main factors in the difficulties that had arisen: the presence of ex-German soldiers as catechists; the foreign priests who were unable to understand the philosophy of the British method of Indirect Rule, which hinged on Native Administration; and Monsignor Rogan's preference for the East African method of enclosures as opposed to the West African method of administration. His Honour regarded Rogan's preference as the main factor in the trouble. "Monsignor Rogan seems quite incapable of realizing that the Roman Catholic and other missions have been quite successful in Nigeria and have carried on their work on reasonable lines without interfering in political matters. As it is, the policies of Monsignor Rogan and of Native Administration could never be worked successfully side by side."⁵⁰⁵

Conclusion

Beyond colonialism, one of the topics that has received a bad press from well-known Cameroonian writers is Christianity. Significant numbers of writers have depicted Christianity and particularly Catholicism, in disparaging and contemptuous terms. Some novels present colonialism together with Christianity as a collapsing edifice. Prominent among these writers are Mongo Beti, Kenjo Jumbam and Ferdinand Oyono. Some of their writings even attack Catholicism in spiteful terms. Most, if not all, of these writers were products of Catholic education and they knew that formal and western-styled education was the privileged monopoly of missionary outreach for many years. It is very unlikely that these illustrious sons of Cameroon were not direct beneficiaries of the sweat and toil of the very missionaries they freely portray in unfriendly terms. The writings of these authors make us wonder if they had an axe to grind with the early missionaries.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁵ BNA-SD/A 1931/4 Confidential Memorandum from the Resident, Cameroon Province, Buea, to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu, October 3, 1931

⁵⁰⁶ Peter Awoh Acho (2010) *The Dynamics and Contradictions of Evangelisation in Africa: An essay on the Kom experience*. Langaa Publishers

“One negative element in the rapid expansion of mission schools in the 1950s was the lack of gentleness employed by many of the missionaries. A number used high-handed methods and bullying tactics in acquiring sites, exacting local contributions and dealing with teachers (...) this less than gentle approach was not confined to educational matters or indeed to this period. However, it was exacerbated by the emergence of a more sophisticated and politicised African with whom the missionary no longer enjoyed the rapport that had been there when the former was a school boy. Faced with this new sophistication, which was often overtly European, the missionary sometimes responded with sarcasm and cynicisms. The African would appear to have accepted any such gracelessness with great tolerance. Looking back from the more tranquil vantage point of life, many of the missionaries regret their behaviour and wish they had tempered zeal with greater respect.”⁵⁰⁷

The hangover of such gracelessness on the part of missionaries has not completely vanished. It was not particular to European clergy or limited to Africa and remains a lesson for all missionaries at all times, be they African or European. The hangover of such gracelessness continues to haunt the Church, not only in Africa but in Europe, Asia and Latin America as well. The case of the Aborigines in Australia and the abuses in Ireland are but two examples. Most of the priests and brothers were men of outstanding character and dedication, but occasional scandals were hushed up and are still largely inaccessible to many researchers. Another temptation, strengthened by the example of many colonial officials, was to treat Africans as an inferior branch of the human race. Brother Kevin mentions an Alsatian brother, whose ungovernable temper led to the death of two Africans.⁵⁰⁸ In Shisong, Thaddeus Taba used to beat the drum in the school barracks at night, tears streaming down his cheeks, as the boys clustered around and danced - not to make merry, but to drown their sorrows. For the Father in charge believed in a lavish systematic use of the cane or the whip and ruled with an iron German sternness that to the boys amounted to a reign of terror. So, at night, around the drum, they stumped and wept and sang. Poto was a

⁵⁰⁷ Kiggins Thomas, *Maynoth Mission to Africa The story of St. Patrick's Kiltegan Gill* and Macmillan 199

⁵⁰⁸ Cf Forristal (1990). *Op. cit.*, p.111

deliberate deformation of Pater or Father, used to hide the fact that they were bemoaning the rule of the priest in charge of the school.⁵⁰⁹ Missionary zeal and the sacrifices of the missionaries were tainted by the very gracelessness with which they carried out their mission.

Kenjo Jumbam is one of those writers whose writing gives us an idea of the predicaments and dilemmas faced by early missionaries, the propagators and the Africans, the recipients and beneficiaries of Christian faith in general and Catholicism in particular. The second chapter of “The Whiteman of God” presents Christianity as a failed enterprise. After years of labouring in the Lord’s vineyard, the people remained deeply rooted in the very traditions they were expected to and should have, turned their backs on. In what is presented as a contest between the most powerful juju in the land and the Whiteman of God, in what can be seen almost as a proof of authenticity and vindication, the Whiteman alongside his God is seen as helpless in front of the most powerful juju of the land.⁵¹⁰

Ferdinand Oyono in his novel, *The Old Man and The Medal*, freely satirizes the colonial situation through the eyes of an old African villager, Meka, who is presented as loyal to the Whiteman. Though he satirizes colonialism, he does not leave Catholicism out of his satire. Catholicism is presented as an extension of the colonial enterprise. The French Catholic priest, Father Vandermayer, is presented as a colonialist rather than a missionary. He is even referred to by Meka as a crook. After Meka’s disgrace at the community centre, all these superstitions spring to his mind like a great tide, sweeping away the years of Christian teaching and promise.⁵¹¹

These writings were part of the ‘Back to Cameroonian Culture Campaign,’ which sought to discredit Catholicism. Reflecting on this rather disturbing trend in the flow of literature, which seemingly was aimed at undermining and denigrating Christianity, the then Archbishop of Bamenda, Paul Verdzekov, went on to say that:

“In Francophone Cameroon, indigenous priests are in the front-line of the research that is going on in this field at various levels in the

⁵⁰⁹ Bernard Fonlon A simple Story simply told

⁵¹⁰ JUMBAM, Kenjo (1980), *The White man of God* Ibadan Heinemann

⁵¹¹ Oyono Ferdinand (1969), *The Old Man and the Medal*. African Writer Series, Heinemann

parishes, in secondary schools and at the University of Yaoundé. As regards the 'BACK TO CAMEROONIAN CULTURE CAMPAIGN,' may I call our attention to the enormous amount of theses that are being written on themes around Traditional Religion by the young graduates of Yaoundé University? From what I have seen, I believe that this theme seems to be by far the most popular. Our young people are too strongly influenced by the ideas on traditional religion and culture in the many African Novels that they read. Practically all these Novels present Christianity as foreign to Africa and as an enemy to the African's cultural heritage. Can we afford to ignore these developments? What strategy do we adopt to meet the new changes?"⁵¹²

No Cameroonian novelist presents Christianity in more vitriolic and acerbic terms than Mongo Beti. In his novel, *The Poor Christ of Bomba*, Christianity is presented in a bad light, as a missionary endeavour that ends in disgrace and failure. He presents Christians in doubt and uncertainty. The "Father" doubts the sincerity of all his roadside converts and the Christians wonder about Christianity. Mutual suspicion is rife. "I'm beginning to wonder myself whether the Christian religion really suits us, whether it's really made to the measure of the blacks. I used to believe it firmly, for didn't Jesus Christ say to his disciples, "Go and announce the Good tidings to all the peoples of the earth?" But now I'm not so sure."⁵¹³ "In Bomba, where the girls were being prepared for Christian marriages, it became very clear why the girls had to stay in the women's camp for such long periods. It wasn't for the good of their souls or for the good of the mission building programme. Only gradually did it become clear that the local Churchmen were using the local girls for their own purposes."⁵¹⁴ Like the missionary outreaches depicted in *The Whiteman of God*, the mission at Bomba ends on a sad note. "There wasn't a sound anywhere, not a whiff of smoke; only a

⁵¹² Verdzekov Paul (1977), *Diocese of Bamenda: Policy Concerning the Use of Cameroonian languages in the liturgy and Catechetics* Bamenda

⁵¹³ Mongo Beti (1988), *Poor Christ of Bomba* African Writer Series, Heinemann page 189

⁵¹⁴ Ibid

great silence as though the cemetery had gradually invaded the whole mission. Bomba had the look of an old abandoned village”⁵¹⁵

The manner in which the missionaries carried out their mission in the southern Cameroons has been the subject of all genus of literature. From historical to literal, to missionary writings, the manner in which these missionaries carried out their delicate task in the most austere of all conditions has left hardly anyone indifferent. For some, these were men of virtue, who braved the odds in all terrain to plant the cross and bring the natives under the yoke of Christ; for others these were villains, who had lost their way and ended up on the wrong side of the circus.

An appraisal of the Christian enclaves of Shisong, Njinikom, Esu and Baseng present a uniform, discernible pattern of scenarios. The enclaves all came into existence after the First World War as a method of sheltering Christians from the wrath of traditional authorities. Shisong, Njinikom and Baseng had the catechist put on trial at one time or another. All of them existed against the wishes of the traditional rulers and the authorities at one time demanded that the catechist be officially removed and replaced. The architects of this phenomenon of Christian villages in the Southern Cameroons had hoped to create an ideal Christian community, secure enough to form a bulwark against heathen influences. They hoped that these enclaves would have a snowballing effect and act like leaven in the dough, but it became impossible for these enclaves to continue to exist. Even though the inhabitants of these enclaves were dispersed for one reason or another, the snowballing effect originally imagined by the missionaries was totally lost.

Both in Shisong and Njinikom, dispersed Christians carried the faith wherever they went. For example, Christians who had left Njinikom for personal or family reasons contributed enormously to the evangelisation of the areas where they lived. In many places, they became the nucleus and axis on which newly founded Christian communities outside Njinikom revolved. This was the case with the Church in Mboh Village. Two Christians who had been part of the Christian enclave of Njinikom provided the nucleus of the first Christian community there. Here the Father succeeded through the aid of one Christian couple, Gabriel Asang and his wife Odilia Nange, who came from Njinikom and inherited an uncle's compound. Gabriel and Odilia had

⁵¹⁵ Ibid

not been to Mass since the year they came to Mboh, as far back as 1950, even though Njinikom was within their reach on foot. They were so delighted to see the Father in their village that they turned up that evening to report themselves to the Father as lost Christians. The Father admonished them of the danger they had been in and exhorted them to begin a new life again as the first Disciples of Christ to the Mboh people. They accepted the admonition and exhortation and, as a sign of their gratitude, Gabriel and Odilia offered a piece of land behind their compound for the Father to build a Church. They made their confession and went to communion after ten years of silent sufferings and hungering for the Lord.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹⁶ MUSI, John Yonghabi, (1990), *A Mission Boy From Nowhere to Somewhere*, Copy Printing Technology Bamenda.

Appendix

Minutes Of The Case Rex Versus Father Van Dal In The Provincial Court Of The Cameroons Province Holden at KUMBA before Major D. S. Cook, Divisional Officer, on the 23rd April 1931

CASE 40/31, REX Versus Father Van Dal (M.26).

CHARGE: Assault on Lucy Ntu (F) contra:

C. C. 351.

PLEA: Guilty.

1st witness. LUCY NTU sworn states: I am a native of Ikom, Ogoja Province, I came to Mbonge about a year ago. I was baptized at Ikom my parents consenting when I was a little girl. About 8 weeks ago I heard that the accused was coming to my town and one evening about 7 o'clock as I was walking in the town I was arrested by about 7 Yaunde men and they took me to the accused who led me to the Catechist's house and slapped my face. He called for a razor and a Yaunde shaved my hair. That night I was shut up in the Catechist's house Yaunde people guarding me. Next morning we set off for Ekumbe Lionge. Should anyone wish accompany us to the bush to see that we didst escape. We spent a night at Ekumbe Liongo but in the morning I went to the accused and asked him to release me from going to the Mission Headquarters at Baseng as I did not understand the language being a stranger to Kumba Division. The accused refused so I said I refused to accompany him any further. He then called some Yaunde men to lay me down and he beat me with a stick. I counted some strokes but I was in such pain that I cannot remember. Someone told me afterwards that I had received 52 strokes. I was crying bitterly and when he had finished he kicked me and ran out into the compound after me kicking me. I showed my backside to the women with whom I had come from Mbonge one I knew as Efembe and it was covered with blood. The accused told me to follow to Bai Kuke and there I fell sick by blood coming from my private parts which was not my normal periods. The accused asked me with whom I had come from Nigeria and I said I had come alone to Mbonge where my sister was married. I admitted allowing other men to sleep with me and for the last 4 months I had lived with an Ibo man from Aro- Chuku called Davies as his friend. I

told accused I was a Christian and used to go to church and pay my ID to the collection. I went to the accused at Bai and he saw how sick I was sorry and gave me 6d and told me when I got better to go back to Ikom, my proper country. He said if he met me at Mbonge again he would punish me more. I still feel pain in my belly and the D. O. has seen marks on my buttocks.

The Yaunde people who arrested me and the ones who held me down while I was being beaten were the same. I do not know them at all. They are not Mbonge Yaundes.

I do not know the people who arrested me. It was a man who said I had received 52 strokes.

2nd witness Efembe sworn states: I was taken from Mbonge by the accused to go to Baseng. It was with the 1st witness Lucy. We reached Ekumbe Liongo after being locked up in a house at Mbonge. I asked the catechists Motembe why I was being taken away without my husband's consent and the Catechist said I would see. When I went to the latrine that night, I was escorted by a Yaunde man accompanying the accused. The Catechist also told me that I was in trouble because I had married a pagan whilst I was a Christian. I remember seeing Agnes Namadu locked up with us. I remember seeing Lucy leave the house at Ekumbe Liongo saying she was going to see the accused. When she returned she was crying and she showed us her backside which had cuts and was covered with blood. She said she had been beaten by the Fathers.

All the time we were guarded like prisoners but I did not know who the Yaunde people were. I asked the accused if I could go to Mbongo Mission instead of Baseng and the accused agreed.

I did not see any strokes inflicted as I was kept in the house where we had spent the night.

I saw Lucy's backside covered with blood in the same house where we all spent the night. Shortly afterwards we left for Bai Kuke.

I saw blood on her buttocks.

The Catechist Motembe did forcibly take me to you at Mbonge in the first place without asking my husband's consent.

I do not know if any arrangements had been made for me and my husband to be married in church.

3rd witness Sakpe sworn states: I am a native of Ekumbe Liongo and a Roman Catholic Mission Catechist in my town. The accused came to my

town about 8 weeks ago and asked me to get carriers which I did. In the morning I brought the carriers to his house and went inside and saw the witness Lucy on the ground being held by some Yaunde men and the accused was beating her with a stick. I did not know the Yaunde men and I did not count the strokes as I was busy getting the loads outside the house. I think she received about 15 strokes.

I was in the house and saw everything. I did not see you put the women down but I saw her held down by the Yaunde men. I heard you order the Yaunde men to lay her down.

4th witness Carmichael Wilson sworn states: I am medical Officer of the Kumba Division. On the 20th March 1931 I was asked to examine the 1st witness Lucy Ntu. I saw her buttocks had 9 stroke marks 4 on right buttocks and 5 on the left. One at least of these strokes had drawn blood.

If the beating had taken place 4 weeks before as the witness informed me the marks showed that it must have been a severe beating.

Defence

Father Van Dal electing to be sworn states, About two months ago I was at Mbongo and there I had the Illoani women taking them to Baseng for teaching doctrine. It was reported to me that the woman Lucy was a prostitute and also a Catholic and that there were three men living with her and her husband was unable to find her as she was locked up whenever he came to the town. She was brought to me and I may have slapped her face as she refused to answer any questions which I put to her. All I could get was "I no hear" "I no savvy". Later in the evening as some Yaundes with me had seen a woman's hair shaved at Meme. I consented to the woman having her hair shaved off with a razor as a mild punishment. She kept on saying "Don't beat me massa" "don't beat me". At Ekumbe Liongo I saw the Yaunde boys beating the woman as they said she refused to go to Baseng. I do not know how many strokes they gave her but I stopped myself. It was a mild punishment and only one stroke was in any way severe. I beat her as a punishment for her sin and for her stubbornness in refusing to answer me.

I also knew I lost my temper and may have pushed and kicked her very mildly. At BaiKuke 2 Yaunde remained with me. The teacher came and said the woman was sick and I thought she was having her usual menstruation. She was punished for her stubbornness. We do not like women like her at

Baseng. I told the teacher to look after her and gave her 6d and told her she could go to her man. I did not threaten her.

No witness

Complaint against Father Cornelius Broers

Education Office

Buea , 6th November, 1942

Dear Rev. Father Staats,

1. I know that you are the Supervisor of the Roman Catholic Schools of this Province and the second in rank to the Bishop. This is why I consider it necessary to bring this complaint before you for redress.

2. On the 3rd instant, I joined the mail-lorry from Kumba to Buea with two Rev. Father, (I understand they are called Herman Bats and Cornelius Broers) who insulted me. At Ekona plantation the lorry was loaded. When it was being reloaded, all passengers were just looking at the motor boy who was doing the loading alone. To act as an example to our people that such a work is not mean, I had to assist the Apprentice Motor Driver in loading the lorry although it was not my concern as a mere passenger. To my greatest surprise, one of the Rev. Fathers by name Herman Bats hailed on me, "you black monkey, make quickly we are waiting on you", in the present of all other passengers. I approached him and asked him to withdraw his expression because loading or unloading the lorry was no part of my work, but he bluntly refused. The other Rev. Father by name Cornelius Broers shouted "you big fool, he is not going to withdraw his expression, get out of it or I'll flog you now" and then he was drawing near as he was ready to use his fists on me.

3. If some of these Dutchmen who go about in this Province preaching to the people the Gospel of Christ, could call a black man a monkey, to his face, I am sorry to say that they are worse than 'Hitler' who style Africans black monkeys in his Book. In fact it is regrettable to have such men in this country who consider that every black man is a monkey and a fool. They will soon poison the mind of the Africans against the whites- which I am quite sure every good English man to prevent.

4.I feel that I should have a written apology from these Fathers or otherwise I shall be compelled to take up matters legally where I will have redress and shall also be compelled to reveal this regrettable incident to the Local Press.

While waiting to hear from you soon,
I remain,
Rev . Sir,
Yours truly,

Clerk, Education Dept.

Copy to: The Hon: Senior Resident,
Cameroons province, Buea, for information and permission to let this incident to the Local Press, please, should in case I fail to have written apology from these Fathers.

Monsignor Peter Rogan's Letter of Undertaking

MILL HILL FATHERS
ST. JOSEPH'S FOREIGN MISSIONARY SOCIETY,
MILL HILL, LONDON, N.W. 7.

Regina Pacis,
Soppo,
P.O. Buea,
British Cameroons,
West Africa.

Saturday, October 10th 1931.

Sir,

In view of the fact that the reprehensible actions of several MILL HILL Fathers have unfortunately led His Excellency the Governor, Yourself and other Officers to believe that we refuse to recognize the authority, rights, dominion, powers, jurisdiction etc. etc. of Native Chiefs, Presidents of Native Courts and others, I hereby give His Excellency, through you, the Resident of Cameroons Province, my guarantee that any Father who recklessly interferes in any obstructive way with the legitimate business of Native courts and with the lawful jurisdiction of Native Chiefs, will be sent out of the country by me immediately, even if his action is not brought to the

notice of the Administration. I have already instructed all our Fathers to send me the full particulars of any Divisional or Native Court findings with which they are not satisfied, instead of 'taking the law into their own hands' where they deem an injustice has been done. I have also addressed a circular to all Fathers to the effect that even 'minor assaults' will be sufficient reason for me in future to send them back to Europe.

In conclusion, I should like to point out that, SEVERAL YEARS AGO, from my arrival in Cameroons in 1926, I had already advised MILL HILL to recall certain Fathers, who, I had already THEN judged, lacked the qualities that life in Africa demands. Also, several years ago, one Father was permanently relieved of his Superior ship: several Fathers were changed to other districts: two were forbidden ever to write either Official or Unofficial letters to Divisional Officers. It is needless to add that neither Father Ham nor Father Moran is returning to West Africa.

I ask you, sir as Resident of Cameroons Province, to forward this letter to His Excellency the Governor.

Yours respectfully,

(Sgd) P. Rogan,

Superior, MILL HILL MISSIONS, Cameroons.

Complaint against Father Van Dal

Confidential. C. 5/1930/89.

30th October, 1931

MEMORANDUM.

From, To,

The Divisional Officer, The Honourable, The Senior Resident,
Kumba Division Cameroons Province, Buea.

ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSION

I beg to acknowledge receipt of your confidential memorandum C.6/1931 of 24th October 1931 containing notes of interviews and letters in connection with the above Mission.

2) In the penultimate paragraph of your notes of an interview with Monsignor Rogan and His Excellency the Governor it is said that Father Van Dal would be given close supervision and not be in charge of any station.

3)I feel very diffident in stating that in my opinion Father Van Dal should not, at the present time at any rate, be allowed to travel through this Division with the exception of visits to Kumba and so prevent any possible recrudescence of his high-handed manner with native adherents to his religion.

4)Mr. Arthur Assistant District Officer, when engaged on the Bakossi Assessment spent four days at Baseng and so came in daily contact for that period with Father Van Dal. The impression given Mr. Arthur was that despite the reproof of July 1930 and the prosecution and conviction of April 1931, Father Van Dal's attitude was in no way chastened or showed in any particular form a change of heart and mind to his work in this country.

He is, an has been stated very young and very inexperienced and if confined to Baseng and Kumba experience in native mentalities and matters will be gained which should fit him in say a year's time to be a more restrained and effective missionary.

Letter from the Fon of Kom to the Divisional Officer Bamenda

Bamenda

27th January 1922

Sir,

I NGAM Fong of Bikom petition the Government that the Roman Catholic mission now controlled by European aliens who do not understand native customs in our country be removed and replaced by English Missionaries who can make themselves to us.

2.The present missionaries are entirely controlled by their following for the most part ex German soldiers whose sole aim is to disorganize our native system of Government and to gain administrative power themselves; to attain this object they offer insult to my religion, my police and messengers and are continually seducing the wives of my people and even my own women.

3.In order to avoid insult I have been forced to divert the main road in order to avoid the village, where against my orders and wishes they have established a separate community which refuses to recognize me. The German Missionaries were established on a site allotted to them by the

Government and no trouble occurred and I was glad to have them there. The present missionaries refuse to occupy this site.

Furthermore Father BINTNER owes me 300 marks (then valued at 300 shillings) which I lent him when he was arrested by English troops and last year I lent him 50 marks. Neither of these amounts have been repaid.

I cannot govern my country if my power is undermined by missionary intrigue.

Letter from the Fon of Nso to the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division

Kumbo

December 26th 1921

To the Divisional Officer
Bamenda

Sir,

Most humble and respectfully to submit before you this my following complaint against P. Tangwa that he want that my country people women and farm men no obey my order and to do my willing; because for German Mission I no be see so; he first Tangwa go call this French Father that I Chief I sent him that them must come to my country and when them came hear so I complained to late Divisional Officer which was died at Bamenda and the Divisional Officer put him Tangwa prisoner before the first Interpreter NITAI go lie Divisional Officer and he left him; the second when he come back lie again that my people put fire to the church house and I pay 1600 marks and for this money which I be pay the people no be like again that church house must be inside country again.

After he began to take my people wife to go Mission and the wife too did not return to their men house again, when yourself Divisional Officer come and return all to their men and he tell them to run go stay Bamum, because he want to do all this make all this people know that he is the chief law his father use to call him that he is a chief, for this reason I want Divisional Officer to put him 16 years in prison. And I know that I am under British, better Divisional Officer to order me English Father , I don't want this French Father in my country again and I no want Tangwa too in my country

again, because he want finish my power, or Tangwa with the French Father want make some time one day Government. Should sent any news to me to give people as Carriers I cannot get one and I get fine nothing; because my country people with the Headmen are crying to me every day and when P. Tangwa be arrested the Father tell he when he come Bamenda must take 10/- and summons me and call he father as witness and don't know sometimes himself get any reason to me.

I have the Honour to be

Sir,

Your obedient Servant

K. MBIBE

Signature of Bansa King

Esu – 20-10-34

Dear Sir,

Sometime you go wonder how Father been stop for your country and no been come for salute you. The reason be that you done promise father a small church in your country and so to now you never keep say, you like Catholics, Catholics be you pikins. The words who you been talk, them be sweet for the ear but for inside your heart you been talk lie. You be big king for big country, but you go small in the eye of them people who get sense, if you talk lie with your mouth. You think say, the Catholics go like you, if you deny church for them? They no go like you, because you move them from God. God go before king.

So me go ask you for the last time for build them church. No go give your ear for the Basle people. The Catholics get same right like Basle's, because them too be your people.

If me come for your country next time, me want for look church. If me no look 'me savvy say, you been talk dasso cunny for father and me go ask Divisional Officer for give me a church for the Catholic people of Wee, which) the chief deny them.

Salute.

Father Arnold

Njinikom.

P.S. if you talk say, me like for give church, but my big men deny, you talk lie, because the big men hear dasso for chief.

Certified a true copy of a letter handed me by the chief of We, at We, 15/3/35. Original (returned to chief at his request) in the handwriting of Father Kerkvliet of Njinikom.

Esu-14-3-35.

Dear Sir,

I am sorry to tell you that I deeply regret the misconduct of the Christians on your behave in sending you this offensive scribble. Honestly I was not in the least aware of their intention. They did not inform me, knowing beforehand that they would meet with a strong disapproval. I do not try in the least to excuse their action. They consider your decision of scattering the Christians an injustice done to them. Perhaps it was not wise on my part to oppose your decision in their presence, since this might encourage their opposition but I was only guided by spiritual if I have been at fault in any way I humbly ask your pardon.

Yours sincerely

(Sgd) Father A. Kerkvlist

Letter of Complaint from the Divisional Officer to the Father Superior Baseng Mission

Divisional Office

Kumba Division

Kumba, 19th July, 1930

Reverend Sir,

I have to inform you that I have received a number of complaints from adherents of your mission of excessive flogging by the Father

It is a question whether some of the complainants may not apply for summonses in the court.

I should naturally deplore such and exposure and hope that you will give me your firm assurance that there will be no repetition of such occurrences.

At the same time I must add that such assurances will not prejudice whatever action the government or the complainants may see fit to take.

I must further add that I have received complaints that Reverend Father Van Dal has committed acts in Baseng village which were very much resented by the villagers and through the Village into a state of approaching panic.

I think it desirable that Reverend Father Van Dal should see me personally in order to explain his actions.

I should add that a general and long standing dissatisfaction was expressed to me by adherents of the mission at the behaviour of Pius Epie; and suggest that in your own interest you should consider the advisability of transferring him.

I have the honour to be,
Reverend Sir,
(Sgd) J.S. Smith
Ag. Divisional Officer

Reverend Father Superior
Roman Catholic Mission
BASENG

Annual Report Kumba Division 1935

	<u>African</u> <u>Helpers</u>	<u>Catechumens</u>	<u>Total</u> <u>African</u> <u>Christians</u>
<u>Basel Mission</u>			
Bombe	61	771	3232
Nyasoso	44	674	2761
Dikome	-	16	1084

Total	105	1461	7,077
<u>Roman Catholic Mission</u>			
Baseng	47	54	4265
Ikassa	24	411	1942
Total	71	465	6207
Total of both denominations	176	1,926	13,284

The figure 13,284 represents 18.8 per cent of the total population of the Division which is 70, 404.

The Language Problem of the Early German Missionaries in Nso Area

“To evangelize the people, we had to face the problem of the medium of instructions. Every tribe had its own mother tongue and it looked almost impossible to arrive at getting one common language to serve for the whole area, although it seemed that the Oku, Noni and Nsungli people communicated freely with the Nso people using the same language. Nso was to be our first mission station around this large area.

This discovery pleased us mightily. We would solve at least partially our problem. It was partial because there were still many other tribes around with many and varied languages and they lived in enmity among themselves. Shall we introduce, so to say, a single language - a missionary language? The idea of introducing a kind of ‘German Pidgin’ suggested itself but there was the difficulty of ‘creating’ such a language. And added to that was the difficult German Grammar.

Many of the German Officials in the country and labourers were using the Pidgin English. This was handy. But the German Government was not in favour of it, as they wanted to introduce at all costs the German language.

The idea of introducing a language like Duala or Yaounde or Fulbe or Rausa as had been done in the South and North respectively suggested itself also. This would still not have solved the problem, since there would still be many tribes. The solution to this problem became a headache indeed!

At last, we decided to teach German in the main station to a few capable people. They could then learn their doctrine through this medium, go back to

their own villages and help teach their own neighbours. This was no satisfactory solution. Without the command of the language of the people, we remained forever strangers to the people, since we could hardly penetrate their souls and worse still, understand him. Some Christian bodies saw in this question of introducing a general language a good solution. It was no solution especially, as we could hardly administer the Sacrament of Penance satisfactorily without a good knowledge of the people's language. We came to be convinced that this problem of language could only be solved by learning the main languages of the people. This was going to be no easy task either. Something had to be done in any case. We sought for solutions. But we soon became convinced that we had to summon courage sit down and begin somewhere. We began with the Nso language which could be used as a medium of instructions for neighbouring tribes like the Oku and Nsungli people. "(Ex Emonts, J.P., *Ins Steppen und Bergland Inner Kameruns*, Aachen, 1927, pp 289 - 993.)

Extracts From: Father Paul Verdzekov Speaks On Inculturation and Its Ramifications

Our early MILL HILL Missionaries made a real effort, as far as I can remember from my own personal experience, to see to it that Catechesis in our Local Church be inculturated, in keeping with the Church's tradition. As John Paul II rightly says: "Genuine catechists know that catechesis 'takes flesh' in the various cultures and milieux" (CATECHESI TRADENDAE, n. 53).

That is why our early MILL HILL Missionaries and their able Catechists, prepared Catechisms in the Local Languages for the Bakweri country, the Balundu country, the Keaka country, the Kom country, the Mbum country, the Nso' country, etc. There are certainly several others, but the ones I have just mentioned are those of which I am absolutely certain, going especially by the early Spiritual Reports of the Missionaries. Such Catechisms in the Local Languages were, of course, absolutely essential as tools for handing on the Gospel Message effectively.

Manual of prayers in the Local Languages were also prepared by the Missionaries for use by our people. I believe some Manuals of Prayers in the

Mankon language (A Manual of Prayers printed in Liverpool) a very long time ago are probably still available in the Archdiocese of Bamenda.

Repertoires of very instructive and well-composed Hymns in our various local languages were also prepared by the Missionaries for use by our people. I recall that in the 1970s, a classmate of mine, Francis Wainchom Nkwain, put together in a printed booklet a fairly large number of Popular Catholic Hymns in his mother tongue, Itangikom, i.e., the Kom Language.

It would seem that local languages were rather neglected in our local Church in later decades. This problem was addressed at a Meeting of MILL HILL Missionaries held at Soppo in early 1949 under the presidency of the Very Reverend Father Thomas McLaughlin, Fifth Superior General of St Joseph's Missionary Society of MILL HILL. While deeply appreciating the marvellous achievements of the evangelising ministry being carried out by his men in extremely difficult circumstances, Father McLaughlin gently pointed out that of the world-wide Missions where MILL HILL Missionaries were working, the then Vicariate Apostolic of

Buea was the lone Mission in which Local Languages were no longer receiving the attention they deserved, contrary to what obtained in earlier decades. According to the Report of the Soppo Meeting of 1949, the point made by Father McLaughlin was taken and MILL HILL Missionaries committed themselves to give much greater attention to Local languages in their evangelising ministry

In one of its most important Documents, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, the Second Vatican Council said, *inter alia*: "Since the Word of God should be available at all times, the Church at all times with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the Sacred Books. And if, given the opportunity and the approval of Church authority, these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them" (DEI VERBUM, n. 22).

Mindful of this solemn teaching, Priests, Catechists and other Catholics of the Archdiocese of Bamenda, have been collaborating and continue to collaborate, with Adherents of other Christian Confessions, in the translation of the Bible, or of portions of the Bible, into local languages. I think immediately of the Kom and Bafut Languages. I believe something similar is taking place in the Diocese of Kumbo.

On 18th June 2000, at a moving public ceremony which fittingly took place on the Piazza of the Fon's Palace at Bafut, the Bafut Language version of the New Testament was solemnly dedicated to God and respectfully presented by the Fon to all the Bafut-speaking people. That version of the New Testament was produced by the Bafut Language Project, in which there involved Presbyterians, American Protestants of the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Catholics. This was a genuine case of Inculturation. The theme of the Dedication Ceremony was: "God speaks to us in Bafut... Listen!"

As we watched the Dedication Ceremony attended by Bafut-speaking people from all walks of life, we were immediately reminded of what took place at Jerusalem at Pentecost. It was there that "devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven... assembled, each one bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language... We hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God" (Acts. 2:3-12).

I am sure that all Kom-speaking people of whatever religious persuasion must feel a similar emotion when they hear the Itangikom version of the Gospel of Saint Luke, a translation realised by Protestants, Catholics and other experts in Linguistics, working in amicable collaboration

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Confidential No. c 6/1931.10 October, 1931 from Resident, Cameroons Province Buea to the Honourable, the Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu

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Memorandum No. 13/1929. vol: III/22. 16 June, 1931. From The Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea to The Chief Registrar, Supreme Court Lagos

Confidential No. c 6/1931./551 June, 1931. Resident, Cameroons Province Buea to the Honourable, the Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu

Confidential Memorandum No. c 6/1931. 14 May, 1931. Resident, Cameroons Province Buea. to the Honourable, the Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu

Confidential Memorandum No. c 5/1930.29 April, 1931. from The Divisional Officer, Kumba Division to the Honourable, The senior Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea.

Minutes of the Provincial Court of the Cameroons Province. Holden at Kumba before Major D.S. Cook, Divisional officer, on the 23rd April 1931.

Confidential Memorandum No. c 2/30/2.11th June, 1930 from The Divisional Officer, Mamfe to The Honourable, The Senior Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea

Confidential Memorandum No. c 5/1930.25 July, 1930, from the Divisional Officer, Kumba Division to the Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea

Correspondence from Divisional Office, Kumba Division, Kumba, 19th July 1930 to Reverend Superior, Roman Catholic Mission Baseng.

Correspondence From Divisional Office, Kumba Division, Kumba, 19th July 1930 to Reverend Superior, Roman Catholic Mission Baseng.

Correspondence from Divisional Office, Kumba Division, Kumba, 25th July 1930, to Reverend Superior, Roman Catholic Mission Baseng.

Confidential Memorandum No. c /6/1930(2)18th July, 1930, from the Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea to the Divisional Officer, Kumba Division.

Confidential Memorandum No. c 5/1930(1).7th July, 1930 from the Divisional Officer Kumba, to the Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea.

Correspondence From Provincial l Office, Cameroon Province, Buea, 27th July 191929 to the right Reverend Monsignor Peter Rogan, O.B.E. Sasse.

Correspondence No. 84/1926/176. The Divisional office, Bamenda, 10th January, 1931, to the Reverend Father Superior i/c Roman Catholic Mission Njinikom.

Confidential No. c 6/1981/55.1 June, 1931. From Resident, Cameroons Province Buea, to the Honourable, the Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu.

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In the Provincial Court of the Cameroons Province, Holden at Kumba before Major D.S. Cook, Divisional Officer, on the 23rd April 1931.

Confidential Memorandum No. c/6/1931.10 November 1931 from The Resident, Cameroon Resident Cameroons Province, Buea, to the Divisional Officer Kumba.

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Confidential Memorandum No. c.6/1931/24th October, 1931 from The Resident Cameroon Province Buea to the Resident i/c Bamenda Division, The Divisional Officers Mamfe and Victoria No.c. 6/1931. Provincial Office, Buea, Cameroons under British Mandate, 10 October 1931.

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Confidential Memorandum No. c 5/1930. 29 April, 1931, from the Divisional Officer, Kumba Division, to the Honourable, the Senior Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea.

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Correspondence From Divisional Office, Kumba Division, Kumba, 25th July 1930, to Reverend Superior, Roman Catholic Mission Baseng.

Confidential Memorandum No. c /6/1930(2) 18th July, 1930, from the Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea, to the Divisional Officer, Kumba Division.

Confidential Memorandum No. c 5/1930(1) 7th July, 1930, from the Divisional Officer, Kumba, to the Resident, Cameroons Province, Buea.

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Correspondence, 27th of January 1922, from the Fon of Kom, His Royal Highness the Fon of Kom to the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division.

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SDA/A 1923/1 FILE NO. 57/1923 A Memorandum no. 277/57/1923 10th June 1924 to the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division to the Public Custodian, Lagos, Nigeria.

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SDA/A 1923/1 FILE NO. 57/1923 Memorandum No. 536/1568/19, 19th April 1926 from Senior Resident Cameroon Province, Buea to the Divisional Officer Bamenda.

SDA/A 1923/1 FILE NO. 57/1923 Correspondence No. 9/57/1923, 11th January 1926 from the Divisional Officer in charge of Bamenda Division to the Reverend Father Scully, Bamenda.

SDA/A 1923/1 FILE NO. 57/1923 Correspondence No. 1/57/1923, 7th January 1926 from the Divisional Officer in charge of Bamenda Division to the Reverend Father Scully, Bamenda.

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SDA/A 1923/1 FILE NO. 57/1923 Correspondence No. 331/80/1924, 14th May 1927 from the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division to Reverend Father Scully Roman Catholic Mission Kumbo.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Confidential Memorandum no. c./3/1931/63 27th of March 1935, from the Divisional Officer Bamenda to the Senior Resident Cameroon Province Buea.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Confidential Memorandum C./1/1931/ 23rd of April 1931, from the Resident Cameroon Province Buea to the Divisional Officer Bamenda.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Confidential Memorandum C./1/1931/ 23rd of April 1931, from the Resident Cameroon Province Buea to the Divisional Officer Bamenda.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Confidential Memorandum C./1/1931/ 23rd of April 31st January 1931, from the Resident Cameroon Province Buea to the Divisional Officer Bamenda.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Confidential Memorandum No. 84/1926/177 12th January 1931, from the Divisional Officer Bamenda to the Senior Resident Cameroon Province, Buea

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 The Provincial Office, Buea, Cameroons under the British Mandate 29th of November 1933, to Monsignor Rogan Roman Catholic Mission Soppo.

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SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Memorandum No. 677/51 22nd June 1939, from the Director of Medical Services Lagos to the Senior Medical Officer Cameroon Medical Area Victoria.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Correspondence from Malcom Donald, Downing Street, 23rd of May 1939 to Governor Sir Bernard Bourdillon.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Correspondence April, 11th 1939 from Sister Mary Loretto, Convent of Our Lady of Peace, Soppo, to the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Correspondence No. V. 462/53 16th August 1939 from the Divisional Officer to the Resident Cameroon Province.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Memorandum No. 9/2/36 9/2/ 1939 from the Senior Medical Officer Victoria Cameroon to the Resident Buea Cameroon.

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SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Memorandum No. 25/BH/ 124/ 3rd of May 1933 The Chief Medical Officer Bamenda Division to the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Confidential Memorandum No. A/3/1931 9th May 1933, from the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, W.M. Bridges A.D.O. for the Divisional Officer to the Reverend Father Superior of the Roman Catholic Mission, Kumbo.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Confidential Memorandum, No. C.3/1931/14 from the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, to the Reverend Father Superior of the Roman Catholic Mission, Kumbo.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Confidential Memorandum, No. C.3/1931/16 25th of May 1933 from the Divisional Officer, Bamenda, to The Reverend Father Superior of the Roman Catholic Mission, Kumbo.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Correspondence No. 758/17, 30th August 1933 from the Provincial Office, Buea, to the District Officer, Bamenda Division.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Correspondence, 1st May 1933, from Father Ivo Stokman, Sacred Heart Mission Kumbo to the Divisional Officer, Bamenda.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Correspondence, 22nd May 1933, from the Father Ivo Stokman, Sacred Heart Mission Kumbo to the Divisional Officer, Bamenda.

SDA/A 1931/3 FILE NO. C.1/1931 Extracts from the notes of the Current Matters Discussed by the Resident with the District Officer (R.J. Hook) at Bamenda, on the 20th and 29th May 1933. Signed by J.W.C. Rutherford Resident in charge of the Cameroon Province.

Correspondence No. 331/80/1924, 14th May 1927 from the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division to Reverend Father Scully Roman Catholic Mission, Kumbo.

Correspondence 27th August 1924 from the Divisional Officer Bamenda Division to Reverend Father Scully Roman Catholic Mission, Kumbo.

This book is the fascinating study of Christian enclaves in the Southern Cameroons of the colonial era. The Christian enclaves came into being with absolute spontaneity as a *modus vivendi*. Oblivious of the danger in store both colonial governments and traditional authorities provided the conditions in which these Christian villages took root and flourished. However what had taken root in the territory as a self-protection mechanism, soon unleashed its lethal, enticing tentacles luring both the wives of royals and commoners into their bosom. This disruptive influence of Christian villages threatened the survival of ethnic groups, arousing the rancour of traditional authorities and civil administrators. In many ways the Christian enclaves inhibited the potential of colonial governments to administer the territory. These states within a state propagated by the missionary in the most insidious and perfidious of all manners sowed within their own bosom the seed of self-destruction. The whole issue of runaway wives of royals and commoners alike who took refuge in the Christian villages troubled both the colonial and traditional authorities. By offering a safe haven to these runaway wives and welcoming women who were outside the traditional male authority in a tribal setup, the missionaries began sowing within the Christian communities the seeds of their own self destruction. Records of wives of Fons and commoners escaping into these enclaves, eloping with a man and returning pregnant remained the regular subject of several colonial intelligence reports. Highhanded methods by missionaries in these villages brought both the missionaries and their work into disrepute. In less than a quarter of a century these enclaves had lost the war of attrition waged by colonial and traditional authorities. Worn out by endless strife and dissension within and without and forced by contingency, what had been conceived to be ideal Christian communities with snowballing effects, saw its premature demise.

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